Sex Trafficking in Nepal: Women’s Experiences of Reintegration

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Abstract

A much neglected area of research concerns the reintegration of formerly sex trafficked women. Very little is known about Nepalese women’s experiences following their return from brothels in India to their families in Nepal. This research explored the reintegration experiences of twenty formerly trafficked Nepalese women who were released, rescued or had escaped from Indian brothels and returned to live in Nepal. The study sought to answer two questions: how do women survivors of sex trafficking experience reintegration; and what are the barriers and the supporting factors that facilitate reintegration. The data was collected through in-depth interviews. At the time of interview the participants were living in one of three different settings: with their families in a rural village; independently or with their husbands in Kathmandu; or in rehabilitation centres run by anti-trafficking Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Kathmandu.

Qualitative data analysis revealed that despite the participants sharing the same identity as a returnee from sex trafficking, reintegration is not a uniform experience. The proposition that reintegration is a unique experience is demonstrated in three case studies. At the same time the women in this study shared a number of common experiences. For instance, the effects of the abuse which women experienced in the brothels continued to impact the women’s day to day living long after their return.

Most of the twenty women who returned to Nepal with the support of NGOs perceived that many of their choices were governed by NGO staff and they therefore lacked autonomy. While waiting to return to their families, these women reported NGO practices such as being sent for HIV tests without their consent, being pressured to take legal action against their traffickers and disclosure of their trafficking history to their families. These practices violated their rights to self-determination.

A few women who returned independently from India to Nepal were able to exercise some autonomy in planning how and when they would return to their families and how they would present themselves to their families. However, the journey home to Nepal for some independent returnees was unpredictable and unsafe in comparison to those women who were assisted by NGOs.

The majority of the twenty returnee women were welcomed by their parents. Nevertheless, all participants who had returned to their home and community were vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination, particularly from community members. The discriminatory practices meted out by community members constitute a denial of basic social or civil rights of access to facilities, and inclusion in society. Some women’s experiences further suggest that NGOs played a negative role
in their reintegration largely due to NGO staff failing to adequately assess a returnee’s family situation and lack of follow up and support for the women once they returned home.

Community discrimination, lack of access to health facilities and HIV/AIDS medication, and limited job options other than agriculture labouring were the key factors that led women to leave their family and village to live in NGOs or independently in Kathmandu. Just five women were living in their village at the time of interview. Notably, none of the women who had returned home with the assistance of NGOs were living in their home or village at the time of interview.

The long term experiences for those women who remained living in their village included developing strategies to cope with villagers’ discriminatory practices, finding a marriage partner and coping with health issues and low income. For independently living women in Kathmandu, many were vulnerable to sexual abuse and struggled to become involved in adequately paid employment in the early days. However, over time most found paid employment and some married a man of their choice. For the women who were living in NGOs, most lacked confidence in finding a job outside the NGO and living independently even though they had undertaken several NGO skills training courses. Many expressed concern about their wellbeing should an NGO where they were living terminate its current support.

As numerous NGOs are involved in assisting women in their repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration, the findings suggest that anti-trafficking NGOs need to take a victim centred approach to assessment of women’s circumstances and pathways to reintegration. Moreover, there needs to be a greater focus on changing discriminatory societal and community attitudes towards returnee women. The study findings suggest that while women’s individual resilience plays an important part in successful reintegration, the main focus for change should be at the structural level. Existing deeply entrenched patterns of discrimination against women generally, and sex-trafficked women in particular, must change if Nepalese women are to be included as equal citizens in the social, cultural and economic life of their country.
Declaration by Author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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No contributions by others.

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None.
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human trafficking, sex trafficking, women, gender, anti-trafficking organisations, returnees, reintegration, Nepal

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Fields of Research (FoR) Classification

FoR code: 1607, Social Work, 100%
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. i

Declaration by Author ........................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................... vi

Keywords ................................................................................................................................................ viii

Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classifications (ANZSRC) ....................................... viii

Fields of Research (FoR) Classification ............................................................................................... viii

TABLE OF CONTENTS ........................................................................................................................ ix

List of Tables .......................................................................................................................................... xiv

Abbreviations .......................................................................................................................................... xv

1. Chapter One ......................................................................................................................................... 1

1.1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 1

1.2. Context of the study ....................................................................................................................... 3

1.3. Structural inequality in Nepal and sex trafficking ...................................................................... 5

1.4. Rationale for the study .................................................................................................................. 8

1.5. Significance of the study .............................................................................................................. 11

1.6. Thesis overview ............................................................................................................................ 12

2. Chapter Two: Literature Review ..................................................................................................... 14

2.1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 14

2.2. A human rights perspective on sex trafficking ........................................................................... 14

2.3. Feminist perspectives on sex trafficking ..................................................................................... 18

2.4. The impact of sex trafficking on women ....................................................................................... 21

2.5. Understanding reintegration ......................................................................................................... 24

2.6. The role of anti-trafficking NGOs in reintegrating formerly trafficked women ....................... 26

2.7. Reintegration programs ............................................................................................................... 28
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.8.</td>
<td>Barriers to reintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9.</td>
<td>Summary and conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Chapter Three: Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.</td>
<td>Research design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.</td>
<td>Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.</td>
<td>The interview guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.</td>
<td>Selection of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.</td>
<td>Conducting the interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.</td>
<td>Participants’ backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9.</td>
<td>Researcher reflexivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10.</td>
<td>Researcher-informant relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11.</td>
<td>Transcribing and translating the interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12.</td>
<td>Data management, coding and analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.13.</td>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.14.</td>
<td>Ethical considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.15.</td>
<td>Limitations of the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Chapter Four: The journey Home: Leaving Brothel Life and Returning to Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.</td>
<td>Life in the brothel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.</td>
<td>Exiting the brothel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.</td>
<td>The journey home to Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.</td>
<td>Arrival in Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.1.</td>
<td>Women’s experiences of anti-trafficking NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.2.</td>
<td>The independent returnees’ experiences of arrival in Nepal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5.3. Anticipating returning home to family ................................................................. 81

4.6. Chapter summary and conclusion ........................................................................... 84

5. Chapter Five: Returning home: Initial responses of family and community ........... 86

5.1. Introduction .............................................................................................................. 86

5.2. Women’s initial experience of returning to their family home .............................. 87

5.2.1. Parents’ reactions: positive, mixed and hostile ................................................. 87

5.2.2. Adverse reactions from extended family members .......................................... 92

5.2.3. Community members’ reactions to returnee women ..................................... 93

5.3. Difficulties associated with returning to family and village life ......................... 97

5.4. Emotional reactions ............................................................................................... 99

5.5. Survival strategies ................................................................................................ 101

5.6. The decision to move away from home and village ............................................. 104

5.7. Chapter summary and conclusion ........................................................................ 106

6. Chapter Six: Experiences of reintegration over time: barriers and supportive factors .. 108

6.1. Introduction ............................................................................................................ 108

6.2. Life in the village .................................................................................................. 109

6.2.1. The struggle to survive .................................................................................... 109

6.2.2. Ongoing abuse and exclusion from family and community .......................... 112

6.2.3. Building family support and regaining status ................................................ 114

6.3. Independent living ............................................................................................... 115

6.3.1. Vulnerability to harm and further exploitation ................................................. 116

6.3.2. Surviving life in Kathmandu .......................................................................... 118

6.3.3. Rejection and isolation from family ............................................................... 120

6.3.4. Challenges in marital life ................................................................................. 122

6.3.5. Newfound autonomy and resilience ............................................................... 124

6.4. Life in the NGO ................................................................................................... 126
6.4.1. The benefits associated with institutional living .................................................. 126
6.4.2. Ongoing exclusion from family and community .................................................. 128
6.4.3. Dependency on NGO support ............................................................................ 129
6.5. Chapter summary and conclusion ....................................................................... 131
7. Chapter Seven: The personal accounts of three trafficked women returning to Nepal . 134
7.1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 134
7.2. Malati’s Story ...................................................................................................... 135
7.2.1. Discussion of Malati’s case .............................................................................. 142
7.3. Kamala’s story ..................................................................................................... 144
7.3.1. Discussion of Kamala’s case ............................................................................ 149
7.4. Smiriti’s Story ..................................................................................................... 151
7.4.1. Discussion of Smiriti’s case ............................................................................ 157
7.5. Chapter summary and discussion ....................................................................... 158
8. Chapter Eight: Discussion and conclusion ............................................................... 163
8.1. Introduction .......................................................................................................... 163
8.2. Women’s experiences of reintegration ................................................................. 163
8.3. Barriers to reintegration ...................................................................................... 167
8.4. Factors that can facilitate integration .................................................................. 171
8.5. Recommendations and implications arising from the findings ......................... 174
8.6. Future directions for research .............................................................................. 176
8.7. Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 177
REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 179
APPENDICES .............................................................................................................. 208
Appendix I: THE INTERVIEW GUIDE ....................................................................... 208
Appendix II: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET ................................................. 211
Appendix III: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM ....................................................... 214
Appendix IV: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET IN NEPALI........................................215
Appendix V: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM IN NEPALI...............................................217
Appendix VI: GATE KEEPER APPROVAL FROM THE ORGANISATIONS..................218
Appendix VII: NODE STRUCTURE ..................................................................................221
List of Tables

Table 1-1: Participants' trafficking circumstances, marital status, and current living arrangements .......... 46
Table 1-2 Participants’ trafficking circumstances, marital status, and current living arrangements continued ............................................................................................................................................................................. 47
Table 3 Participants' Information Chart................................................................................................................. 61
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABA</td>
<td>American Bar Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>AATWIN</td>
<td>Alliance against Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune-deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECPAT</td>
<td>End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>JIT</td>
<td>Joint Initiative in the Millennium against Trafficking in Girls and Women</td>
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<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MWCSW</td>
<td>Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHRC</td>
<td>Nepal Health Research Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHRC ONRT</td>
<td>National Human Rights Commission, Office of the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Women and Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONRT NHRC</td>
<td>Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Women and Children, National Human Rights Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder</td>
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<td>SLC</td>
<td>School Leaving Certificate</td>
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<td>SOFA</td>
<td>State of Food and Agriculture</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Chapter One

1.1. Introduction

Each year thousands of people are trafficked across the world for a variety of reasons including forced labour, bonded labour, debt bondage and sex work (US Department of State 2014). The 2013 Global Slavery Index ranks Nepal fifth out of 162 countries in terms of prevalence of modern slavery which includes human trafficking (Walk Free Foundation 2013). Nepal is listed as an origin, transit and destination country for men, women and children in the vast web of trafficking activities (US Department of State 2014).

The trafficking of Nepalese girls for sexual exploitation to India has historical roots beginning in the 19th century (Human Rights Watch 1995). Today, Nepalese girls and women may be subjected to sex trafficking within their country and abroad. Reliable statistics on the scope of trafficking of Nepalese girls and women from Nepal to India is difficult to ascertain due to Nepal’s long, open border with India and the clandestine nature of the crime (American Bar Association 2011).

In the late 1980s in Nepal, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their donor partners, academics and the national government began to address the issue of trafficking and the perceived associated problem of HIV/AIDS. Indeed, Butcher (2003) suggests that one of the main reasons sex trafficking first came to public attention in Nepal was because HIV/AIDS was linked to returnee women from sex work in India and sex workers came to be viewed as a ‘public health threat’. Sex trafficking in Nepal is viewed as a health issue associated with the growing HIV epidemic [United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) 2002; Nepal 2007; Silverman 2007; Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (UNAIDS) 2008].

Community awareness of sex trafficking has increased rapidly in the last few years with a proliferation of activities, including increased police interventions and brothel raids to free women (Locke 2010, p. 3). Once Nepalese women are rescued, released or escape from brothels, they face the challenge of re-establishing their lives, often in the context of personal physical and psychological damage, community discrimination and limited economic opportunities (Simkhada 2008; Poudel 2009; Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012).

NGOs such as Maiti Nepal, ABC Nepal, Karuna Bhavan, Nava Jyoti and Sakti Samuha are at the forefront of assisting trafficked women who return to Nepal [SAHARA Group and Beyond Trafficking: a Joint Initiative in the Millennium against Trafficking in Girls and Women (JIT) 2004], typically through prevention, remediation, and advocacy programs (Kaufman & Crawford
Women are usually offered shelter, health checks for HIV/AIDS, legal advice, remediation activities such as livelihood skills training, and assistance to reintegrate with their families (UNODC 2008). For many NGOs, reintegration is the last step in the rehabilitation or remediation phase and is largely assumed to mean returning women to their families and communities: ‘reintegration of a survivor back into her home community is considered to be the final step in a successful rehabilitation process’ (Locke 2010, p. 90).

Although reintegration of women is an extremely important phase of assistance to formerly sex trafficked women it has received less research attention compared to other aspects of sex trafficking (Schloenhardt & Loong 2011). In 2004, a study by SAHARA group and JIT on best practices on rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficked women in Nepal identified the need for a greater focus on reintegration. Nonetheless, few studies have been carried out in recent years which explore the experience of reintegration of previously trafficked women for sex work (Chaulagai 2009; Poudel 2009; Adhikari 2011; Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012). This thesis intends to build on the existing knowledge base surrounding the sex trafficking of Nepalese women who have returned to Nepal from brothels in India by focusing on the reintegration experiences of women. There is a need for an in-depth understanding of women’s reported experiences of the processes of reintegration, the personal and social barriers faced, and the factors that may facilitate reintegration. The current research differs from other studies on reintegration by foregrounding the voices of survivors of sex trafficking themselves and by including both women who were assisted by NGOs and those who initiated their own reintegration.

The widely accepted definition of trafficking from the UN’s Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children is used to understand the concept of trafficking. In the Protocol ‘trafficking in persons’ is defined as:

... the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (UN 2000, p. 2).
This definition highlights the range of ways in which women may be recruited into sex work, which commonly involve coercion, deception or fraud. It also highlights how a woman can be considered to have been trafficked even if she has given her consent (Cree 2008).

The objectives of the Protocol are: ‘to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, paying particular attention to women and children; to protect and assist the victims of such trafficking, with full respect for their human rights; and to promote cooperation among States Parties in order to meet those objectives’ (UNHCR 2008, p. 22). The human rights framework on which it is based is discussed in relation to sex trafficking in the following chapter.

There appears to be no universally accepted definition of reintegration of formerly sex trafficked persons. Nonetheless, it is commonly viewed as the ‘end’ point of a woman’s trafficking experience. In Nepal, the term ‘reintegration’ is often used without clarification (SAHARA Group & JIT Nepal 2004, p. 23) and conceptualised by different stakeholder groups in somewhat different ways. Chen and Marcovici (2003, p. 17) state that reintegration is often used to describe the process of survivors’ reunification with their families. The NGO Maiti Nepal, for example, views the process of reintegration for the returnees whom they assist as ‘tracing the women’s parents, inviting them to Kathmandu, providing them with information and counselling and covering bus fares back to their villages’ (Maiti Nepal 2008, p. 28). These definitional issues are explored further in the literature review.

Equating successful reintegration with women returning and staying home has been critiqued as unfairly holding individual women responsible for the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of their own reintegration (Segrave, Milivojevic & Pickering 2009, pp. 186-190). Debates in the literature surrounding ‘reintegration’ are discussed more fully in the following chapter. However, it is important to note here that the concept of reintegration in this study takes into account women’s choices regarding their return to family and community, the structural barriers and facilitators that may work for and against productive engagement in social and economic life, and the importance of respect for women’s rights in any reintegration processes.

1.2. Context of the study

Trafficking human beings for profit is a global issue and is ranked as the third most lucrative form of organised crime, bringing in an estimated $32 billion a year worldwide (Ortuno & Wiriyachai 2009). The 2014 US Trafficking in Persons Report (p. 45) notes that 44,758 victims of human
trafficking were officially identified in 2013, worldwide. Both transnational and local organised crime groups have financial interests in sex trafficking, and human trafficking has also been linked with other organised crime such as drug trafficking and money laundering (US Department of State 2006). In Nepal sex trafficking is a ‘well-organised business’ where traffickers rely on their local networks within communities to recruit women (Jha & Madison 2011, p. 83).

The market economy, based on supply and demand factors is a significant driver of the trafficking industry (US Federal Bureau of Investigation 2006; Kotrla 2010) and is evident in the Nepalese context. Nepal and India have deep historical, geographic, linguistic, religious and cultural ties (Gurung 2003; Bhattarai 2007) and share an open border. The two countries signed a bilateral treaty in the 1950s which allows Nepalese and Indian citizens to work and travel freely across this border. Sex traffickers use the open border to take advantage of the Indian sex market and although there is a large supply of Indian women for sex work, women from Nepal and Bangladesh are also in demand (Hart 2012). It is estimated that each year 5000-10,000 girls are trafficked to India (The Global Unition 2014). ‘Buyers’ of sex apparently prefer young girls who are often underage (Raymond and Hughes 2001). A survey carried out in New Delhi revealed that men prefer ‘lighter-skinned Nepali sex workers’ rather than darker-skinned local sex workers (IOM 2003, p. 21). Hence, there is a thriving market for young Nepali girls in India.

Sex trafficking is an issue of major concern for the various International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) in Nepal, including End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT International), Save the Children (US), International Labour Organisation (ILO), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). At the national level in Nepal, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MWCSW) is the lead Nepalese government agency in combating human trafficking. A recent report commissioned by this body argued that ‘responding to human trafficking is “an uphill task” for Nepal, especially since this country is in prolonged political transition’ (MWCSW 2013, p. 39). An earlier US Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report (2012) forewarned that although the government of Nepal has endeavoured to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, it continues to fall short of the standards.

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1 The terms ‘Nepali’ ‘and ‘Nepalese’ have been used interchangeably throughout the thesis. However, the term ‘Nepali’ has mostly been used to refer to language and people, and ‘Nepalese’ has been used to refer to culture and context.
It seems that although the issue of sex trafficking reached public attention and the political agenda in Nepal some twenty years ago, little progress has been made towards eradicating the problem. In fact, it is suggested that the rate of trafficking is increasing in Nepal due to economic stagnation and political instability (Rai 2011). While these economic or political factors undoubtedly foster lucrative, exploitative activities including human trafficking, Nepal’s lack of progress in combating sex trafficking of women arguably reflects the country’s entrenched societal caste and gender based inequalities.

1.3. Structural inequality in Nepal and sex trafficking

A person’s social and economic status in Nepal is largely determined by the intersection of caste, gender, ethnicity and location factors. Women are the main victims of sex trafficking (Gurung 2014) and caste appears to influence a woman’s vulnerability to being trafficked for sex. Up to 80 percent of girls and women who are trafficked for sexual exploitation come from lower caste and low-status ethnic groups (Rai 2011). Caste beliefs and practices have a profound impact on the everyday lives of Nepalese women (Locke 2010; Crawford 2010). It is therefore important to understand how inequality is structured in Nepal and the part that inequality plays in sex trafficking and reintegration, particularly the structural barriers that formerly trafficked women are likely to face when re-entering Nepalese society.

Caste inequality

Nepal is extremely diverse in terms of caste, ethnicity, language, religion and culture (Bhattachan 2003). The most recent National Population and Housing Census 2011 (National Report) states that there are 125 caste/ethnic groups in Nepal. The census also indicates that 81.3% of the population follow Hinduism, 9.0% Buddhism and the remaining percentage follow Islamic, Kirat, Christian, Prakriti, Jain and Sikh faiths. The report further shows that 123 different languages are spoken as a first language in Nepal and ‘Nepali’ is spoken as the mother tongue by 44.6 percent of the population.

The categorisation of ethnicity is a highly complex and contested issue in the context of Nepal (Hangen 2007; Pokherel 2011). For example, Sherpa and Tamang can be considered as both ethnic groups and caste groups (Jacobson 2000); therefore it is difficult to make simple distinctions between caste and ethnicity due to the overlapping nature of identity (Hangen 2007; Pokherel 2011). While acknowledging the complexity and tensions surrounding ethnic identity in Nepal this
study draws on the work of political scientists Joshi and Rose (cited in Pokherel 2011, p. 8) who categorise the Nepalese population into three ethnic groups in terms of their origin: Indo-Nepalese, Tibeto-Nepalese and Indigenous Nepalese. The first group Indo-Nepalese (Indo-Aryan) comprise the majority of Nepal’s population. This group largely follows Hinduism in which the social order is determined by a complex caste system based on four Varna or caste groups: Brahmin, Kshetriya, Baishya and Sudhra. Baishya and Sudhra people often experience caste discrimination; additionally those belonging to the Sudhra caste are considered to be ‘impure’ or ‘untouchable’ (Gellner 1997; Acharya, Mathema & Acharya 1999; Dahal, Gurung, Acharya, Hemchuri, & Swarnakar 2002; Bishwakarma 2003).

The second group, Tibeto-Nepalese (also called Tibeto-Burman people), are politically, socially and economically marginalised by the dominant Indo-Nepalese group (Pokherel 2011). Many castes/ethnic groups such as Sherpa, Tamang, Rai, Magar, Limbu, Gurung, and Thakali belong to this group.

The third group, the indigenous peoples of Nepal, include tribal communities such as Tharu, Kumal and Danuwar. These communities are also socially, politically and economically marginalised in Nepalese society. It is widely acknowledged that lower caste Hindus and most ethnic groups in Nepal routinely experience economic, social and political marginalisation and discrimination (Bennett, Dahal & Govindasamy 2008, p. 4; Pokherel 2011).

Caste beliefs and practices have a profound impact on Nepalese women, who occupy a subordinate status in the dominant patriarchal Indo-Nepalese culture and Hindu religion (Basharat 2009; Locke 2010, p. 51). However there are variations across and within caste and ethnicity in relation to discrimination against women. Higher caste Hindu women may enjoy some of the privileges of higher caste status, but experience restrictions in public life, while lower caste Hindu women are doubly disadvantaged by their gender and lower caste status. Women from Tibeto-Burman and indigenous backgrounds are subject to discrimination and marginalisation at the broader socio-economic level in Nepal, yet may be afforded greater personal freedom within their group’s cultural practices regarding marriage, involvement in work, and control over household property (Acharya, Mathema & Acharya 1999). Nevertheless, while not all women are disadvantaged in the same way in Nepal, Tibeto-Burman and lower caste Hindu women are the main victims of trafficking (Hennink & Simkhada 2004). It is important therefore to understand the position of women in Nepal and the attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate discrimination against Nepali women. These beliefs and attitudes are likely to influence women’s experiences of reintegration.
Gender inequality

The US State Department’s *Trafficking Victims Act of 2000* states that gender issues and the low status of women in many parts of the world have fuelled the trafficking industry. The World Bank (2012, p. 12), referring to the disadvantaged position of women worldwide, states:

For poor women and for women in poor places, sizable gender gaps remain. And these gaps are even worse where poverty combines with other factors of exclusion - such as ethnicity, caste, remoteness, race, disability or sexual orientation.

Multiple factors interconnect to reinforce structural inequalities and the everyday practices of social exclusion of women in Nepali society (Kabeer 2010). Nepalese women are subordinate to men in every aspect of their social lives. Although women comprise more than half the population, they face discrimination in education, health, economic, political and social aspects of life in both urban and rural settings (Bennett 2005; Thapa 2008). Male children are viewed as an asset in Nepalese society, while girls are viewed as an ‘economic burden’ to their family (Aengst 2001, p. 6; Poudel 2003). A woman’s life is controlled first by her father, next by her husband and in later life by her son (Bhattachan 2003; Poudel 2003). In the Hindu belief system women tend to be viewed as: ‘no less than a property and asset that could be discarded whenever the feeling arose, regardless of the fact of her being a sister, daughter or mother’ (Basharat 2009, p. 244). Because Nepalese girls are viewed as the property of males, they are commonly trafficked by male family members (Poudel 2003; Coomaraswamy 2005; Thapa, 2008; Simkhada 2008).

Nepalese society places a high value on a girl’s virginity before marriage (Subedi 2003; Hennink & Simkhada 2004). Additionally, it is believed that a woman should only ever have sexual relations with her husband, whereas similar beliefs do not apply to men (Brown 2006). Values and beliefs about women’s sexual purity are likely to impact on the way formerly trafficked women experience reintegration into family and community life.

Gender based violence and discrimination against Nepalese women has placed them in a disadvantaged position in terms of health, education, economic opportunities and decision making (Acharya et al. 2010; Lamichhane et al. 2010; Amnesty International 2014). Women in general are expected to take responsibility for household tasks such as raising children and carrying out all domestic chores (Aengst 2001). Lack of education and skills and limited access to productive resources such as land, property and credit keep women in low productivity agriculture jobs or lower paid informal work (Thapaliya 2001). Although women in developing countries, particularly
in rural areas, spend most of their time in agricultural labouring and managing their household, their economic contributions are largely ignored and do not count as ‘economically active employment’ in national accounts (The State of Food and Agriculture [SOFA] team & Doss 2011, p. 2).

Nepal’s MDGs (the Millennium Development Goals) Progress Report (2013, p. 32) suggests that a large number of women are still mostly employed in traditional sectors and they often work for no ‘monetary remuneration’. Nonetheless, this report further suggests that there is an increasing trend among women in Nepal to go overseas for employment. Women who return to their communities after being employed overseas in ‘honourable’ work such as domestic service are usually received positively by their communities, whereas those who are thought to have returned from involvement in the sex trade are poorly received (Mahendra, Dahal, Crowley, Bhattarai, Daly, & Langton 2001, p. 1).

Lack of education has forced many girls and women living in urban settings to work in exploitative situations, for example: cabins [bars], dance or ‘dohori’ restaurants and massage parlours. Research conducted by Shakti Samuha (2008) reveals that the working environment in such places is hazardous, demeaning and destructive for women, as they are often coerced to provide sexual favours for their customers. It seems that gender inequalities which exist in the domestic sphere continue into the public sphere where women are forced to become involved in degrading jobs.

Patriarchal values, socio-cultural and economic structures, gender roles and power differentials, poverty and lack of education, as described above, are the major factors said to make women vulnerable to trafficking in Nepal (Mahendra et al. 2001; Simkhada 2008). These factors are likely to impact on women’s attempts to reintegrate into Nepalese society. In this research structural inequality, particularly gender inequality, provided the backdrop for exploring returnee women’s experiences of reintegration.

1.4. Rationale for the study

Research on trafficking in human beings is important for gaining greater understanding of the issue, establishing preventative strategies, developing policy and best practice and evaluating the ‘impact of prevention and rehabilitation efforts in order to ensure that funded programmes are in fact effective’ (UNODC & UN. GIFT 2008, p. 14). Poudel, Richardson and Laurie (2009, p. 259) argue that the ‘livelihood opportunities and strategies’ of previously trafficked women on returning to

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2 Nepali folk songs
Nepal are currently under-researched; consequently, it is suggested that more academic attention needs to be given to the circumstances of returnee women. Furthermore, more knowledge is needed about how women’s lives unfold in the context of the often traumatic aftermath of trafficking within the social and economic circumstances of their country of origin. Understanding the reintegration experiences of formerly trafficked women should inform service providers and policymakers about how to improve assistance to ensure that trafficking victims can lead productive lives (UN News 2013).

Research on reintegration in the context of sex trafficking in Nepal has provided some important insights but overall the circumstances and detailed experiences of returnees is under-researched (Chen & Marcovici 2003; Hennink & Simkhada 2004; Frederick 2005; Project Parivartan 2006; Crawford & Kaufman 2008; Simkhada 2008; Bowles 2014). Frederick (2005) observes that the topic of reintegration has been given minimal attention by donors, NGOs and the government of Nepal. Nonetheless, reintegration is perceived as the most difficult stage of anti-trafficking efforts (Frederick 2005; Sanghera 2005).

While a detailed discussion of the range of studies relevant to reintegration is provided in the next chapter it is useful to make brief reference here to the body of knowledge that has emerged from existing reintegration studies. In the Nepalese context, studies that have been conducted on previously trafficked women for sex work show that many women return from brothels with significant physical and psychological health problems, particularly HIV/AIDS and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Silverman, Decker, Gupta, Maheshwori, Willis & Raj 2007; Tsutsumi, Izutsu, Poudyal, Kato & Marui 2008; Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light & Watts 2010 ). Research also shows that returnee women are often stigmatised and rejected when they return to their communities (Mahendra et al. 2001; Chaulagai 2009; Poudel 2009; Jha & Madison 2011). Formerly trafficked women often face difficulties in obtaining citizenship (Laczo 2003; Poudel et al. 2009; Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012) and women may return to sex work (Simkhada 2008; Locke 2010).

To date few studies have been carried out on the specific subject of reintegration of sexually trafficked women in Nepal. Existing studies have tended to focus on NGO staff’s view of reintegration and data derived from returnee women’s case records rather than on the views of survivors themselves (Crawford & Kaufman 2008; Locke 2010). Thus an organisational perspective is prominent in developing knowledge of reintegration (Chen & Marcovici 2003; SAHARA & JIT 2004; Shakti Samuha Review Report 2008; USAID 2009).
Although NGO based research on reintegration provide some insights into the reintegration efforts made by NGOs in order to reintegrate previously trafficked women, there is no available data on the outcomes of their services for women (Crawford 2010). It also has been reported that NGOs which are involved in reintegrating the returnees lack follow up processes for survivors (SAHARA & JIT 2004; Frederick 2006; Kaufman & Crawford 2011). In this context, it is not known whether women are reintegrated back into Nepalese society, are being further exploited or re-trafficked after they leave an NGO. Bowles (2014, p. 89) points out that the NGOs’ efforts on reintegration can lead to various outcomes which may be positive, negative, or unexpected. On this basis, Frederick (2006, p. 324) is critical of those NGOs that claim their reintegration efforts are successful, without conducting systematic evaluations to back these claims.

As discussed above, there is little information available on the reintegration experiences of sexually trafficked women. Furthermore, it is not clear whether the organisations that rescue, repatriate and reintegrate the women are acting in their best interests (Project Parivartan 2006; Sanghera 2005) and, most importantly, what happens to women after they return or the NGOs send them to their family.

There is, therefore, a need for a better understanding of returnee women’s experiences of the help they receive from NGOs regarding their reintegration into society. This understanding needs to privilege the perspectives of returnee women. A deeper understanding is required of the ways in which families respond to women when they return to their villages and their experiences of reintegrating into community life over time.

This study places returnee women’s experiences and perspectives at the centre of the research. As well as exploring the experiences of women assisted by NGOs, it is crucial to understand the experiences of women who have not sought or received assistance from NGOs and who make their own way to their families or make other arrangements for their survival in Nepal. The current study includes the perspectives of a number of women who were not associated with NGOs and whose stories are, therefore, difficult to access and mostly absent in reintegration and trafficking studies.

There is a need for in-depth information about the barriers women face during reintegration, the supporting factors in their reintegration, and their means of survival after reintegration. These factors may inform service providers and policymakers to improve their quality of service to ensure that returnee women in Nepal can become equal citizens in the social and economic life of their society.
1.5. Significance of the study

The main significance of this study is to make a contribution to understanding the process of reintegration at a deep level, and the barriers and facilitators of reintegration from the perspective of women themselves. It attempts to explore women’s capacities to cope within the context of their doubly devalued position in Nepalese society as being women first and then sex trafficked women. It is envisaged that the study will make a modest contribution to understanding how one group of women are re-integrated or further marginalised in the contemporary social, cultural and political context of Nepal.

A detailed understanding of reintegration of this kind should provide insights into better practices around reintegration that enhance returnee women’s human rights, increase their capacity and recognise the part they want to play in their society. However, this study does not take the position of exploring how women can best ‘fit back’ into a society that routinely devalues women and sees them as objects that can be bought or sold. Instead it seeks to understand how Nepalese society, from the perspective of those most affected by sex trafficking, could be more affirming and inclusive of sex trafficked women. As suggested by Locke (2010, p. 3) ‘the problem that remains is how to re-integrate survivors back into society in a way that improves their standard of living and limits the potential for further exploitation’. The study should provide further insights into the structural changes required to enhance women’s human rights in Nepal and the policy and practice directions that would support such change.

This study also has significance in developing an understanding of organisational responses to assisting formerly sex trafficked women to re-integrate into society. It is designed to explore women’s own experiences of NGO processes surrounding reintegration and the outcomes of these processes. It is therefore anticipated that such information will assist organisations to work more effectively with trafficked women, which may include modifying existing practices and formulating new policies.

Finally, the use of intersectionality as an analytical tool to analyse a selection of case studies may provide a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which factors such as gender, ethnicity/caste, class, age, location and health status interact to shape women’s individual experiences. Hankivsky et al. (2012, p. 18) state that ‘Intersectionality encourages critical reflection that allows researchers and decision-makers to move beyond the singular categories that are typically favoured (e.g. gender, ‘race’ and class) in policy analysis to consider the complex relationships and interactions between the aforementioned trinity and other social locations and identities, such as Indigeneity, sexuality, gender expression, immigration status, age, ability and religion.’ Maj (2013) further
suggests that this theory has practical applications for researchers, policy makers and helping institutions in addressing women’s diversity.

1.6. Thesis overview

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. The first chapter is a general introduction to the scope of human trafficking in Nepal and the status of women in Nepal. The rationale for the research and the significance of this study are outlined.

The second chapter focuses on the review of the literature surrounding sex trafficking and reintegration. This chapter discusses the main perspectives through which the issue of sex trafficking is viewed, namely human rights and feminist perspectives. Existing research on reintegration is outlined and critically examined.

The third chapter first introduces the research questions and outlines the qualitative methodology used. Background information on the participants is provided and the researcher’s experiences of field work are discussed. Finally, the process of data management and analysis, ethical issues associated with conducting the research, and the limitations of the study are considered.

Next, a chart is presented that identifies each participant, along with significant turning points in her life such as her living circumstances prior to trafficking, how she exited the brothel and returned to Nepal, and her current living arrangements. This chart is intended to assist the reader to readily identify the participants when reading their quotes in the findings chapters.

Chapter Four provides background information regarding brothel experiences which can affect women’s reintegration. It focuses on the women’s experiences of life in the brothels, their exit from the brothels and their return to Nepal. In addition, this chapter discusses how independent returnees managed their return to Nepal and how women assisted by NGOs experienced NGO services in India and upon arrival in Nepal.

Chapter Five focuses on the women’s experiences after they returned to their family in their community, particularly family and villagers’ reactions to their return, and challenges in adapting to village life and work requirements. The difficulties and supportive factors surrounding family reintegration and the reasons for leaving village settings are explored.
Chapter Six discusses the ongoing difficulties experienced by returnees as a result of their sex trafficking background. It identifies the different pathways associated with reintegration and the similarities and differences in the returnees’ experiences based on location in Kathmandu, a village setting, or an NGO. Women’s aspirations to establish a meaningful life within their social networks and economic sphere are further explored.

Chapter Seven presents detailed case studies of three participants. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of reintegration, intersectionality is used as an analytical tool to understand how social and cultural factors interact in the construction of women’s experiences of reintegration. The case studies highlight each woman’s unique experience of reintegration.

Finally, in light of the findings presented in the data chapters, chapter eight provides an overview of the women’s experiences of reintegration and the barriers to and facilitators of reintegration. The implications of the findings are discussed and directions for future research are then proposed.
2. Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature on sex trafficking and reintegration. The purpose of this review is to provide the context for this research and illustrate how the reintegration of sex trafficked women has been studied and understood to date. The literature has been sourced predominately from academic publications spanning multiple disciplines including criminology, human rights, sociology, psychology and feminist studies. It also includes reports issued by non-government organisations in Nepal and other grey literature.

There is an abundance of literature on sex trafficking that attests to both its global significance and the increasing attention it has received from scholars since the turn of the millennium (Segrave, Milivojevic & Pickering 2009). Consequently, this review is of necessity indicative rather than comprehensive and focuses predominantly on the issue of reintegration. The literature review is structured as follows. The first section explores sex trafficking as a human rights issue. Sex trafficking is commonly conceptualised as a human rights violation and, according to this framework reintegration involves a process of redress for such violations. The second section canvasses the feminist literature on sex trafficking, which views sex trafficking as a form of gendered violence, but also encompasses debates on the agency of the women concerned. In this section, consideration is also given to how the theory of intersectionality can enhance understandings of the unique experiences of returnee women. The third section examines the literature on the effects of sex trafficking on women. The fourth section focuses on research on the reintegration of trafficked women, while the final section distils the main findings of the literature review and discusses how they inform the current study.

2.2. A human rights perspective on sex trafficking

From a human rights perspective, victims of trafficking are seen to be deprived of their human rights and freedom, with many contemporary writers equating this practice with modern day slavery (Miller 2006; Mohajerin 2006; Segrave, Milivojevic & Pickering 2009; Bernat 2010; Hua 2011; Nnadi 2013). Trafficked women are treated as commodities, tricked, sold, resold, exchanged and even used to repay debt (US Department of State 2008). Violence towards women is repeatedly reported and noted in the sex industry. Victims of sex trafficking may suffer from emotional abuse, rape, torture, forced abortions and starvation, with pimps, traffickers, brothel owners and clients generally assumed to be the perpetrators (Raymond & Hughes 2001). In these ways, women’s rights to liberty, autonomy and freedom from exploitation, abuse and slavery are violated.
Because sex trafficking is viewed as a human rights violation, rights-based practice is commonly recognised as an important framework for working with trafficked women (Locke, 2010; Zheng 2010; Adams 2011; Jibriel 2011; Haddadin & Klimova-Alexander 2013; McAdam 2013; National Human Rights Commission, Office of the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Women and Children Nepal [NHRC-OSRT], 2014). The human rights-based approach adopts a view of trafficked persons as ‘active participants and beneficiaries of anti-trafficking initiatives’ and recognises that trafficking survivors should have input into the programs that are designed to assist them (Jibriel 2014, p. 227). Such initiatives are aimed at preventing trafficking, protecting victims and prosecuting traffickers in a manner that prioritises the human rights and dignity of trafficked persons (UNODC 2009, p. 8).

Human rights are underpinned by the ‘principle of equal rights for all people’ and governments have a recognised role in upholding this principle (Sullivan 2007, p. 9). Accordingly, there are a wide variety of international and national conventions, laws and organisations which are dedicated to safeguarding the rights of trafficked women and children. International conventions include the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography* (United Nations 2000a) and the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*, which supplements the UN’s *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (United Nations 2000b). Nepal has ratified several of these protocols as well as other international and regional human rights instruments that focus on protecting the rights of children and combating the trafficking of children, forced labour, and the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation. The UN *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children* (2000) reflects the international community’s commitment to eradicating human trafficking and addresses all aspects of human trafficking (Brusca 2011). This provides the most inclusive legal framework for defining and criminalising trafficking in human beings at the international level. Schloenhardt and Loong (2011) describe this protocol as the only enforceable international legal instrument that contains some provisions pertinent to the reintegration of trafficking survivors. However, Nepal has not yet ratified this protocol (NHRC-OSRT 2014).

In Nepal there are numerous laws aimed at combating trafficking in persons and assisting victims. *The Interim Constitution of 2007* guaranteed basic human rights for all citizens without discrimination, including freedom from human trafficking, exploitation, forced labour, slavery, and servitude, and the right to constitutional remedy (ABA 2011). The Nepalese government also introduced a separate anti-human trafficking law in the form of the *Human Trafficking and
Transportation (Control) Act (2007). This Act provides a framework for the government to address human trafficking and incorporates provisions for the rescue, protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of trafficking (US Department of State Report 2009). For example, the Act makes specific reference to establishing rehabilitation centres for victims and assisting them to reconcile with their families, as well as ensuring that they are not subject to further exploitation. In addition, the Act offers a legal framework for punishing those involved in trafficking and the provision of compensation by the offender to victims or their families.

In addition to these laws, the government of Nepal has formulated the National Plan of Action (NPA) against trafficking in persons for 2011-2016. This plan has identified five key areas for intervention. These are: prevention, protection, prosecution, capacity building and cooperation. With the aim of promoting and protecting the rights of survivors of trafficking, the government of Nepal has also developed a policy on Rescue, Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration, widely known as the 4-Rs policy (NHRC-OSRT 2012, p. xv). The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MWSSW) has prepared three key documents: Guidelines to Operate Rehabilitation Centre 2011; National Minimum Standard of Rehabilitation Targeting to Trafficking in Persons 2011; and Guidelines for Psychological Counselling for the Service Provider. However, a report commissioned by NHRC-OSRT (2014, p. xv) states that these documents have not been disseminated to key stakeholders.

On an international level, organizations such as UNICEF, ECPAT, ILO, UNDP and Human Rights Watch are working towards the elimination of child prostitution and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes (UNICEF 2008). Similarly, numerous anti-trafficking NGOs in both Nepal and India aim to protect the rights of survivors and are involved in rescuing, rehabilitating, repatriating and reintegrating women into their families and communities (Samarasinghe 2008; Crawford 2010; Barthwal-Datta 2012).

The US State Department (2014) claims that anti-trafficking institutions in Nepal have had limited impact: anti-trafficking laws have been implemented in an ad hoc manner; funds allocated for protection have been used ineffectively; and trafficking victims have received insufficient support from the government. The Nepalese government’s commitment to implementing anti-trafficking laws has been called into question and it is claimed that government officers have at times colluded with traffickers (Deane 2010). Similarly, despite the existence of laws to safeguard returnee women’s rights and a growing number of organisations dedicated to their care, many trafficked women continue to experience violence, abuse, and exploitation (Poudel 2009; Adhikari 2011;
Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012). As a result, victims of sex trafficking in Nepal do not enjoy the rights to which they are entitled under existing legal and institutional frameworks.

Several factors have been identified as impeding the success of initiatives aimed at protecting the rights of formerly trafficked women and responding appropriately to their needs after they return to Nepal. There is limited funding available to rehabilitate trafficking survivors, who commonly experience serious physical and psychological problems (NHRC-OSRT 2014). NGOs must also compete for this funding and adhere to ‘donor-driven’ agendas which may not necessarily accord with the needs of survivors (Locke 2010, pp. 121-122). Moreover, some anti-trafficking NGOs have been accused of not recognising and at times violating women’s human rights such as freedom of movement. For example, Frederick (2006) claims that Nepalese NGOs were holding returnee women without their permission and not consulting them regarding plans for their rehabilitation. Locke (2010) similarly asserts that some NGOs in Nepal fail to respect women’s human rights by limiting their agency and autonomy. Nepalese laws in relation to property, inheritance and citizenship represent additional barriers to successful reintegration because they tend to disadvantage women and limit their livelihood opportunities (Poudel, Richardson & Laurie 2009). Negative community attitudes towards trafficked women are an additional significant impediment to the realisation of their rights (Poudel, Richardson & Laurie 2009; Deane 2010).

The media has also been implicated in compromising the safe return of victims of trafficking and hindering their reintegration by violating their right to privacy. The Trafficking in Persons Report (U.S. Department of State 2014) states that unwarranted media attention can compromise the safety of survivors and that their photos, names and stories should not be published without their consent. Unauthorised information can harm the reputation of the survivors and has potential to ‘reactivate trauma or shame years later’ (U.S. Department of State 2014, p. 30). Yet in Nepal, formerly trafficked women’s rights to privacy are frequently violated by the Nepalese media with real-life videoed and recorded testimonies published in various media outlets (Mahendra et al. 2001; ABA 2011, p. 82). Anti-trafficking NGOs in Nepal have at times also violated women’s rights to privacy. Some NGOs allow survivors to be observed by donors and other stakeholders and photographed by media without their permission (Frederick 2005; ABA 2011). These practices may result in further victimisation and discrimination.

In sum, it would appear that a rights based approach to both combating sex trafficking and reintegrating returnee women has met with limited success. This is partly because it is the responsibility of individual states to prosecute traffickers and assist victims. In the case of Nepal, limited recognition has been given to the rights of returnee women or the structural barriers to
reintegration that they face on their return. These barriers have been highlighted by feminist scholars who have developed gendered accounts of sex trafficking. The main feminist frameworks for understanding sex trafficking and reintegration are outlined below.

2.3. Feminist perspectives on sex trafficking

Women and girls make up 70% of trafficking victims worldwide (UNODC 2014), with the majority believed to be trafficked for sex work. Sex trafficking is therefore recognised as a gendered phenomenon. Feminists internationally and locally argue that sex trafficking is a result of structural inequalities, discrimination and violence against women or more specifically the unequal power relations that exist between men and women in patriarchal societies, where men routinely exercise control over women (Poudel & Carryer 2000; Coomaraswamy 2005; Miriam 2005; Baird 2007; Jeffreys 2009; Mitra & Subramaniam 2009; MacKinnon 2011; Brysk & Maskey 2012). However, despite this common understanding feminists are divided on what approach should be taken to address sex trafficking.

‘Feminist abolitionists’ for example tend to equate sex trafficking with prostitution and view both activities as forms of male violence against women (Miriam 2005; Jeffreys 2009; MacKinnon 2011; Raymond 2013). Consequently, their aim is to abolish prostitution, believing that this will eliminate demand for sex work and end sex trafficking. Abolitionists favour policies which aim to assist women to leave sex work, change societal practices that perpetuate sex trafficking and prostitution, and strengthen laws that criminalise traffickers and the procurement of sex (Dempsey 2010, pp. 1730-31).

On the other hand, non-abolitionists aim to end sex trafficking but support women’s rights to engage in sex work (Kempadoo & Doezema 1998; Soderlund 2005; Agustin 2008; Spanger 2011; Ahmed & Seshu 2012). Some non-abolitionists claim that many women who are constructed as victims of sex trafficking are autonomous individuals whose behaviour is to some extent motivated by economic considerations and who have made rational choices to work in the sex industry (Butcher 2003; Agustin 2008; Meyers 2014). These writers are critical of the ‘rescue industry’ that has grown up around sex trafficking and the moralising discourse adopted by feminist abolitionists who view women as passive victims of sexual exploitation (Cavalieri 2011).

It is argued that the majority of anti-human trafficking programs and policies are based on the rhetoric of feminist abolitionists (Soderlund 2005; Agustin 2008; Ahmed & Seshu 2012; Santokie
In Nepal, the *Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act* (2007) prohibits prostitution and the purchase of sex. Most anti-trafficking programs and policies discourage prostitution and therefore, from a non-abolitionist perspective, violate women’s right to choose sex work as an occupation. Doezema (2004) further argues that although proponents of anti-trafficking programs may have good intentions to protect women, they often produce unintended negative outcomes such as restricting women’s agency, including their right to migrate and earn money through sex work.

As a strategy for preventing trafficking of girls and women, the government of Nepal in conjunction with anti-trafficking NGOs have formulated laws which monitor women’s mobility and place restrictions on their migration (Crawford 2010; Baruah & Tuladhar 2012; Lee 2014). Some anti-trafficking NGOs in Nepal routinely monitor and question young women who intend moving to India (Crawford 2010; Maiti Nepal 2013; Lee 2014). Women who cannot provide a valid reason for travel are assumed to be trafficked and are subsequently intercepted or detained and brought under the protection of NGOs for an ‘indefinite period’ (Lee 2014, p. 216). Critics point out that these strategies not only violate women’s migration rights but also perpetuate an image of women from developing countries as being unable to freely consent to prostitution, and hence need to be ‘rescued’ from the sex industry (Gunnell 2004, Agustin 2008; Spanger 2011; Lee 2014). These images are reinforced by the Nepalese media (Rana 2002) as well as the international press, popular films and documentaries (Baker 2013, 2014). Gunnell (2004) further argues that ‘stopping trafficking’ could be problematic for an impoverished country like Nepal where it is believed that foreign money, which women earn through prostitution is an important source of income for some families. Notably, migrant women’s remittances have played an important role in reducing poverty at the household level in Nepal (Bhadra 2013).

The preceding discussion indicates that the agency of sex trafficked women has been the subject of considerable debate for many feminist writers and researchers. This situation is even more complex when consideration is given to a sub-group of women who may have initially been victims of sex trafficking, but who later made the decision to stay in sex work (Butcher 2003). The following comment by one Nepalese woman who decided to stay in the sex industry six years after being trafficked to India exemplifies this choice:

‘Why would I want to return to Nepal? I have friends here, I make good money. In Nepal, what would I do? Look after goats and have no money! I’m good at my job and I know it. I don’t want to return to Nepal’ (Butcher 2003, p. 1983).
Butcher (2003, p. 1983) therefore suggests that it is more useful to view sex work as a continuum, with ‘trafficked girls at one end and women who have decided to work as prostitutes at the other’. In a similar vein, Meyers (2014) suggests that all trafficked sex workers should be free to remain in sex work if they choose to do so, provided work conditions and pay are sound. One of the dangers associated with not allowing trafficked women this choice is that it heightens the risk of being re-trafficked, especially if they are forced to return to the same impoverished family and community which made them vulnerable to trafficking in the first place (Locke 2010). Nonetheless, Cavalieri (2011) has pointed out that women who ‘choose’ sex work are often exercising ‘constrained autonomy’ due to their limited economic options. Moreover, these women are very vulnerable to harm, particularly in those locations where sex work is unregulated (Cavalieri 2011, p. 1440).

Interestingly, Santokie (2012, p. 2) argues that the ongoing debate amongst feminists concerning the agency of sex trafficked women has detracted from the more fundamental question of whether women are ‘getting assistance in a form that they actually want and that would be useful to them’. Moreover, she claims that anti-trafficking programs should foster women’s autonomy and recognise the relationships that shape their particular identities and experiences, rather than adopting a ‘one size fits all’ approach (Santokie 2012, p. 3).

In recognition of the heterogeneity of sex trafficked women, some feminist researchers and writers have considered sex trafficking in the light of intersectionality theory (Cavalieri, 2011; Mahat, 2011; Robertson & Sgoutas 2012). The advantage of adopting a feminist intersectional perspective is that it allows for an examination of how aspects of identity such as race, gender and location intersect to produce different experiences (Crenshaw 1989). While initially focused on understanding women’s experiences of marginalisation at the group level, more recently intersectionality has been used to gain an understanding of individual women’s experiences (Cole 2009; Hammack 2010; Mirza 2013).

Intersectionality acknowledges the impact of multiple identities such as class, religion, race, ethnicity, age, disability, health status, caste, sexual orientation, location and personal biography (Bogard 1999; Riley 2004; Kundsen 2005; Cronin & King 2010). These ‘social dimensions’ of women’s lives are important because they represent power arrangements that are not necessarily fixed but can play out differently depending on context, where ‘the dynamics of each may exacerbate and compound the consequences of another’ (Bogard 1999, p. 276).

As discussed in chapter one, Nepal is a multi-caste, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multilingual and multicultural society and these factors are recognised as being significant in women’s experiences
of sex trafficking. Gurung (2014, p. 170) argues that sex trafficking of Nepali girls and women is rooted in, and fuelled by ‘multiple factors, multi-level inequalities, and the intersection of these inequalities’. Mahat (2011) interviewed Nepalese anti-trafficking workers and reported that workers believed that trafficking survivors’ experiences of discrimination could be exacerbated by the interplay of social identities such as gender, caste, age and location. She concluded that if anti-trafficking NGOs incorporated an intersectional approach into their programs, they could respond more effectively to individual women’s needs and target their programs accordingly (Mahat 2011). Similarly, Cavalieri (2011, p. 1447) points out that one of the main benefits of adopting an intersectional approach to sex trafficking is that it acknowledges the unique experience of each woman and recognises the dangers associated with ‘one-size-fits-all intervention’.

Robertson and Sgoutas (2012) argue that in order to more fully understand the lived experience of sex trafficking, researchers need to incorporate qualitative methods that use an intersectional lens to analyse the narratives of survivors. However, to date, no research has been conducted on how the intersection of social and personal factors may impact women’s experiences of reintegration in Nepal.

Notably, little research from a feminist perspective has been conducted on the reintegration of formerly sex trafficked women. As pointed out in the previous discussion, feminist authors have tended to focus on articulating and arguing their respective positions on sex trafficking rather than investigating trafficked women’s experiences of returning home. In sum, feminist authors have drawn attention to the political, social and economic dimensions of sex trafficking, which in turn have assisted in publicising the issue and bringing it to the attention of governments and law makers. Other researchers have focused on documenting the physical and psychosocial impacts of sex trafficking on women in recognition that an understanding of these impacts is crucial to planning effective intervention. The following section examines the extant research on the effects of sex trafficking on women.

2.4. The impact of sex trafficking on women

Although limited empirical research has been conducted on the impact of sex trafficking on women and children, several systematic review reports suggest that victims of commercial sexual exploitation can experience a range of physical, psychological and social effects (Rafferty 2008; Oram, Stöckl, Busza, Howard & Zimmerman 2012; WHO 2012). Notably, sex trafficked women and children are at increased risk of violence, mental health disorders, physical health problems,
developmental delays, suicide and contracting sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS (Rafferty 2008; Hossain et al. 2010; Oram et al. 2012; WHO 2012). Impacts on health are likely to be cumulative, with mental health symptoms such as post-traumatic stress and depression often persisting longer than physical complaints (WHO 2012). These impacts are likely to be influential factors in shaping women’s experiences of reintegration and hence are discussed in further detail below.

Women trafficked for sexual exploitation in India are reported to be at an increased risk of physical and sexual violence (Oram et al. 2012; George & Sabarwal 2013). Sexual violence has social and physical consequences for women and often continues to affect their lives after the violence itself has ended (Herman 1997; Mason & Locrick 2012). Sex trafficked women commonly report health complaints such as headaches, fatigue, memory problems, pelvic pain, trauma to the vagina or anus, urinary difficulties and other physical injuries (Hossain et al. 2010; Oram et al. 2012; Desphande & Nour 2013; Zimmerman & Pocock 2013). Other health risks associated with sex trafficking include pelvic inflammatory disease, unplanned pregnancies and forced abortions (Huda 2006). These health consequences can adversely impact women’s fertility and heighten their social exclusion through reducing their marriage prospects (Byrne, Marcus & Powers-Stevens 1995, p. 42). Sexual violence has also been implicated in the death of victims as a result of suicide, HIV infection or murder (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano 2002, p. 149).

Women who enter sex work via trafficking are particularly vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections and are perceived to be at high risk of HIV because of the large number of clients they have to service and the inability of many women to negotiate condom use (Alam 2007, Silverman et.al 2007; George & Sabarwal 2013). India is listed as having the third largest population living with HIV/AIDS in the world, with approximately 2.4 million infected individuals (UNAIDS 2008). The high rate of HIV infection is partly linked to some Nepalese and Indian men’s beliefs that sex with a virgin will cure sexually transmitted diseases, which has created a demand for younger girls in the sex market (Aengst 2001). Young girls are at particular risk of HIV transmission for two reasons: firstly, they are often intimidated by their clients who insist on not using condom protection; and secondly, they are more physically susceptible to contracting HIV/AIDS (Aengst 2001). Women who are HIV positive are generally evicted from Indian brothels (Human Rights Watch 1995).

Silverman et al.’s (2007) research on Nepalese girls and women trafficked to India and repatriated to Nepal revealed that 38% were HIV positive. They reviewed the case records of 287 girls and women residing at Maiti Nepal, an NGO that assists trafficking victims. Although the study was
limited to a single organisation, this reported rate of HIV infection among returnees is disturbing. The study also suggests that repatriated survivors of sex trafficking are at risk of being pressured to engage in unsafe sexual practices (Silverman et al. 2007). This may also play a critical role in spreading HIV.

Consideration of the above health impacts is important because existing studies suggest they shape women’s experiences of reintegration (Derks 1998; Zimmerman 2006; Silverman et al. 2007; Abas et al. 2013). In addition, Raymond and Hughes (2001) observe that some women develop drug and alcohol related addictions in the brothels and that the need for money to support a substance habit may discourage them from leaving prostitution. For these women, the process of reintegration is likely to be much more difficult if they are contending with substance abuse problems.

In the literature on the mental health outcomes of trafficking, post-traumatic stress and depression are the two most reported psychological responses, with suicidal ideation commonly being associated with extreme forms of depression (Zimmerman & Pocock 2013). In one study conducted in Nepal, Tsutsumi et al. (2008) reported that a high proportion of female survivors of trafficking experienced anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Crawford and Kaufman (2008) examined the case files of formerly trafficked Nepali women who were residing in a shelter and found that in addition to somatic complaints, many of these women exhibited behaviours such as social withdrawal and low motivation. Other studies report that returnee women exhibit low self-esteem, feelings of shame, self-blame and self-stigmatisation, which may act as additional impediments to their reintegration (Derks 1998; Chaulagai 2009).

Research conducted in Europe suggests that the mental health symptoms associated with trafficking are likely to persist longer than most physical ailments (WHO 2012). However, how women suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, somatic complaints or depression readjust to life in Nepal is still an unanswered question. The primary source of data of most studies on the impact of sex trafficking on women is the case records kept by anti-trafficking NGOs, which rarely provide insight into the women’s ongoing experiences.

Notably, after being repatriated from sex work in India, some formerly trafficked women return to prostitution in Nepal (Simkhada 2008). In a nationwide survey of female prostitutes in Nepal, a significant number of women reported earlier experiences of being trafficked in Nepal or India (New ERA 1998). It has been suggested that many women re-enter sex work because they are rejected by their community of origin and have few choices regarding alternative employment (Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012). In addition, some evidence suggests that women growing up in
developing countries whose first sexual experience was forced are vulnerable to adverse mental health outcomes as well as further sexual exploitation (Population Council 2004).

The existing research on the impact of sex trafficking on women suggests that returnees have wide-ranging psychosocial and mental health needs, although it is unclear how these are being addressed. It has been suggested that knowing more about the social and health consequences of sex trafficking would allow for the development of more effective and accessible services targeted to the specific needs of returnee women (UN.GIFT 2008). Such services are likely to play a crucial role in reintegration, which is critically discussed in the following section in terms of both differing conceptualisations of this process and the extant research on the reintegration of formerly trafficked women.

2.5. Understanding reintegration

There is no internationally accepted definition of reintegration or standards of practice recognised on a global level regarding the reintegration of trafficked women (The Asia Foundation 2005). Similarly, in the Nepalese context, there is no consensus on how reintegration should be understood or defined. The organisations that work with formerly sex trafficked women do not clearly specify what procedures they follow for reintegration and usually equate reintegration with reunification with family (Chen & Marcovici 2003). Buet, Bashford and Basnyat (2012, p. 54) point out that the Human Trafficking and Transportation Control Act introduced in Nepal in 2007 similarly fails to define reintegration, although it is underpinned by the assumption that women will return to their families.

According to SAHARA and JIT (2004, p. 3) ‘successful reintegration encompasses the absolute acceptance of the returnees by their respective families and by society, without any discrimination’. However, this goal may not be achievable in a country such as Nepal where there are entrenched negative attitudes towards women who have been involved in sex work. Cody (2012, p. 13) argues that what ‘successful’ reintegration actually looks like is open to debate, and that an NGO’s idea of success may be different to that of individual returnees. Other anti-trafficking institutions have developed indicators of successful reintegration. For example, the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT) identifies self-reliance and safety, including being not at risk of re-trafficking or further exploitation, as primary indicators of successful reintegration (2008, p. 35). It is further suggested that returnees themselves must drive the reintegration process, which must be specific to their needs and contexts (UN.GIFT 2008). The aim of reintegration put forward by the IOM (2007, p. 81) ‘is to provide for a victim’s safe, dignified and sustainable return and a
normalized life’. However, this definition does not make clear what a ‘normalized life’ means in the context of sex trafficking.

Chen and Marcovici (2003) concluded from their study on the status of reintegrated girls in several districts of Nepal that reintegration programs need to be responsive to the particular needs of returnees rather than presume that reunification with family is the primary goal. They further suggest that a working definition of reintegration should incorporate the following: voluntary return; control over life options; and protection against re-trafficking (Chen & Marcovici 2003, p. 17). Shaki Samuha, an anti-trafficking NGO run by survivors in Nepal, contends that regardless of whether a woman returns to her community or moves elsewhere, self-reliance and independence are essential to successful reintegration (Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012, p. 55). Conceptualising reintegration in this way highlights the importance of economic reintegration. Derks (1998), however, argues that focusing primarily on economic factors can minimise the importance of adopting a holistic approach to reintegration that recognises returnees’ social, psychological, health and religious needs.

Surtees (2013) conducted a study on trafficking survivors’ experiences of reintegration in the Greater Mekong Sub-region of South East Asia and concluded that both the economic and social dimensions of reintegration need to be recognised. Surtees (2013, p. 38) developed a more inclusive definition of reintegration that includes five key indicators: ‘settlement in a safe and secure environment, access to a reasonable standard of living, mental and physical well-being, opportunities for personal, social and economic development, and access to social and emotional support’. However, whether these indicators can be transferred to other contexts is debatable. Hepburn and Simon (2010) suggest that the social, economic and political arrangements that are unique to each country will play a large part in shaping people’s experiences of trafficking, citing the caste system in India as one example of a country-specific factor that is interconnected with trafficking. Similarly, returnees’ experiences of reintegration are likely to be influenced by their particular geographical location (Crawford 2010). In the case of Nepal, factors such as widespread poverty and discrimination against women are likely to be obstacles to reintegration (Frederick 2005). In addition, individual factors such as level of education, skills and abilities, health status and access to social capital are equally likely to be important considerations in understanding women’s different experiences of reintegration (Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012).

The above discussion highlights both the lack of a commonly accepted definition of reintegration as well as some of the different perspectives on what constitutes successful reintegration. It is noteworthy that the voices of trafficked women themselves are absent from these debates. In this
regard, it could be argued that greater attention needs to be focused on how trafficking survivors themselves understand reintegration. To date, no research has been conducted on how returnees define or understand the reintegration process. Possibly, this is partly due to the difficulties in accessing this population. There is, however, a growing body of literature and research on the challenges associated with reintegration and the care and support needs of women post-trafficking. An overview of this literature is provided in the next section, which first provides an overview of the reintegration efforts of anti-trafficking NGOs before examining the extant research on NGO reintegration programs in Nepal.

2.6. The role of anti-trafficking NGOs in reintegrating formerly trafficked women

In Nepal, research on reintegration has predominantly focused on the work of government and non-government anti-trafficking organisations in assisting women return to their families and communities (Kaufman & Crawford 2011). Anti-trafficking NGOs in Nepal have been involved in repatriating women trafficked to India since 1996. These NGOs are supported by a range of institutions including the UN, government bodies and foreign donors (SAHARA & JIT 2004, p. 11). Fujikura (2001) claims that the Nepalese government initially raised objections to repatriating trafficked women and girls who had been rescued in raids on Indian brothels. Despite this reluctance, in 1996 the government worked with several anti-trafficking NGOs to bring 124 girls back to Kathmandu, subsequently placing them in rehabilitation centres. Since that time, the number of NGOs involved in anti-trafficking efforts has increased substantially. In 2007, fifty-seven NGOs were operating in Nepal (ONRT –NHRC 2008), with the work of these organisations being supplemented by the efforts of nineteen INGOs (Crawford 2010).

Anti-trafficking NGOs provide a range of services to returnee women which can generally be classified into four categories: prevention, indirect prevention, remediation, and advocacy (Kaufman & Crawford 2011, p. 653). Prevention is a core aim of anti-trafficking institutions globally (United States Department of State 2012). Nepalese NGOs’ prevention strategies focus on public and community awareness campaigns, and intercepting potential victims (Maiti Nepal Annual Report 2013). Indirect prevention includes promoting women’s rights and increasing their access to education, vocational training and microcredit programs (Kaufman & Crawford 2011; Maiti Nepal Annual Report 2013).

Remediation programs are defined as ‘efforts toward the care and support of trafficking survivors, programs for their rehabilitation, and attempts to reintegrate them into their communities’
(Kaufman & Crawford 2011, p. 653). In order to recover from their ordeal and re-engage with their communities, such programs and services are viewed as essential for most victims of trafficking (Jayagupta 2009; Segrave, Milivojevic & Pickering 2009; Lyneham 2014). Under remediation programs, women undergo a series of medical checks and are often involved in counselling. Most women also participate in vocational training programs while they are living in NGOs (Evans & Bhattari 2000, p. 27).

Finally, ‘advocacy’ efforts commonly focus on prosecuting traffickers and law reform (Bennett, 1999 as cited in Kaufman & Crawford 2011, p. 653). However, in the context of Nepal, effective legal redress for victims has been difficult to achieve. While most NGOs encourage women to file a case against their traffickers, Nepali women are usually trafficked with the involvement of family or community members, which means that they may be put at risk of further victimisation if they pursue legal action (Adams 2011). The Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act 2007 of Nepal has provision for punishment of traffickers and compensation to victims. However, the Nepalese government does not directly compensate victims and if the perpetrator has no assets, this provision cannot be enforced (Wong 2013).

Despite their efforts to assist trafficking victims, NGOs in Nepal have been subjected to considerable criticism by some anti-trafficking campaigners and researchers. They have been accused of misusing donors’ funds, being donor rather than victim-centred, not respecting the autonomy of their clients, and not coordinating their services (Joshi 2001; SAHARA & JIT 2004; Frederick 2005; Asman 2009; Locke 2010; Browne & Dharssi 2014). A shortage of professionally trained social workers has been identified as a further factor in poor service quality for trafficking victims (ABA 2011, p. 9). It has been claimed that many NGOs in Nepal are run by higher caste or upper class Nepali women who are more interested in personal and financial gain than providing meaningful help to trafficked women (Joshi 2001; Samarasinghe 2008; Asman 2009; Kaufman & Crawford 2011; Browne & Dharssi 2014). Obtaining reliable data on the work and expenditure of anti-trafficking organisations is also difficult, and inefficiencies in the allocation of donor funds have been noted (Kaufman & Crawford 2011, p. 653). Nonetheless, these NGOs are the primary source of existing knowledge on the reintegration of formerly trafficked women. This knowledge base is critically examined below.
2.7. Reintegration programs

Limited attention has been given in the literature to formerly trafficked women’s experiences of return and reintegration. This is partly due to the difficulties of locating these women once they have returned to their home country (Hennink & Simkhada 2004; Cwik & Hoban 2005; Frederick 2005; Schloenhardt & Loong 2011; Lyneham 2014). In the context of Nepal, many returnees do not wish to draw attention to their previous involvement in sex work because of the stigma associated with working in the sex industry and its association with HIV/AIDS (Simkhada 2008, p. 236).

Due to the fact that this population of women is largely hidden, existing knowledge on the reintegration of formerly trafficked women is largely based on studies generated through NGOs. Most of these studies are limited by unrepresentative samples or poor research design (Kaufman & Crawford 2011). Researchers usually seek the cooperation of anti-trafficking organisations to locate returnees, which in turn means that women who return to Nepal independently are often excluded from such research (Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012). These studies are often based on interviews with NGO workers, analysis of case records and, less commonly, interviews with returnees.

Alternatively, NGOs report their data to bodies such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Office of the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Women and Children (OSRT) Nepal. According to a report commissioned by the NHRC OSRT (2014), during the period 2012—2013 twelve NGOs assisted 1325 survivors of trafficking and foreign labour migration to reintegrate with their families or gain independent employment. However, no data is available on whether reintegration of the survivors was successful, and the report concluded that research is needed to understand the outcomes of reintegration, including whether returnees end up being re-trafficked (NHRC OSRT 2014).

Some studies conducted in Nepal suggest that NGOs have had partial success in reintegrating women into their original communities (SAHARA & JIT 2004; Crawford & Kaufman 2008; Chaulagai 2009; Adhikari 2011). For example, in an exploratory study conducted by Chaulagai (2009, p. 71), the findings suggest that the employment training programs offered by NGOs do assist some returnees to reintegrate with their communities. However, Chaulagai (2009) relied on data provided by NGOs, which could not be independently verified. In addition, his study highlighted that societal stigma coupled with the returnees’ self-stigmatisation were significant barriers to reintegration.

Similarly, a small-scale qualitative study conducted by Adhikari (2011) indicated that the support programs offered by NGOs have assisted some returnees to improve their economic situation as
well as cope with discrimination and stigma, in turn elevating their self-esteem. Adhikari (2011) interviewed eight returnees and two NGO workers and made the observation that an ongoing challenge faced by returnees is ensuring a sustainable income. On this basis, she concluded that the economic empowerment of women should be a greater focus of the work of anti-trafficking NGOs (Adhikari 2011).

Crawford and Kaufman (2008) examined a random sample of twenty case files of trafficking survivors who had been rehabilitated in an NGO shelter to ascertain the long-term outcomes for these women. They noted that while most of these women did eventually return to their villages, they could not conclusively conclude that the NGOs’ reintegration efforts had been successful, pointing to the need for further systematic evaluation (Crawford & Kaufman 2008). In addition, they expressed reservations about whether the sample had been representative of the general population of returnees given that only one returnee was HIV positive.

Crawford and Kaufman (2008) further highlighted the importance of equipping returnees with income-generating skills, suggesting that skills training such as sewing and candle making provided by NGOs can be practical in village settings. NGOs anticipate that such training will assist in facilitating the women’s reintegration once they have returned to their respective villages (Evans & Bhattari 2000; Frederick 2006; Maiti Nepal Annual Report 2013). However, Kaufman and Crawford (2011) point out that the effectiveness of skills training in assisting women to generate their own incomes has not been adequately evaluated. This view is echoed by Locke (2010, p. 216), who observes that the training women receive while residing in rehabilitation centres may be ‘irrelevant to the economic realities of the village’

In an effort to establish best practice guidelines on the rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficked women and girls in Nepal, SAHARA and JIT (2004) consulted a range of stakeholders including anti-trafficking NGOs, UN agencies, police, community leaders and seven trafficked women who had previously resided in rehabilitation centres. The authors of this report concluded that for many returnees, reintegration was not successful, with ‘successful reintegration’ defined as complete acceptance by their families and communities (SAHARA & JIT 2004, p. 3). Notably, reintegration proved to be more successful when women returned to communities that held more liberal views on sexual matters, which in turn enabled survivors to marry and maintain their livelihood (SAHARA & JIT 2004, p. 41). For some women, the money they bring home from their work in the brothels may also assist in the reintegration process (SAHARA & JIT 2004, p. 23).
While the above studies suggest that NGOs do play a crucial role in reintegrating survivors of sex trafficking, as mentioned in the previous section their operations have been the subject of considerable criticism. These criticisms extend to their reintegration efforts. For example, Frederick (2006, p. 324) argues that many NGOs in Nepal do not adequately monitor their reintegration programs or provide follow-up services, which means they lose contact with returnees who are ‘supposedly reintegrated’ into their communities. In addition, he is critical of NGOs that claim ‘a high rate of success’ in their reintegration efforts but fail to provide post-reintegration support to women who have left their shelters (Frederick 2006, p. 324).

In a study aimed at evaluating anti-trafficking interventions informed by a human rights framework, Pearson (2004) concluded that NGOs are failing to tailor reintegration programs to individual survivors’ needs, which includes recognising their right to re-enter prostitution. As well as not adequately informing returnees of their rights, Pearson (2004) is critical of NGOs that do not offer alternative living options for those women who do not wish to return home. Marriage tends to be viewed uncritically as a strategy for reintegration, while returnees are often infantilised and treated as passive recipients of services rather than active decision makers about their lives (Pearson 2004, p. 12).

Locke (2010) observes that many formerly trafficked women re-enter sex work or are vulnerable to re-trafficking, even after participating in rehabilitation programs in Nepal. Employing a multi-method approach to data collection based on participant observation, interviews and focus groups with workers from eight anti-trafficking organisations, Locke (2010) concluded that NGOs profess many ideals that are not matched by what they do in practice. For example, NGOs often compete for resources, which promote exploitative practices such as putting trafficking survivors on public display to generate publicity for their organisations and attract funding. Locke (2010, p. 111) also observed a ‘top down’ approach to rehabilitation and reintegration operating in Nepal, where donors establish agendas based on Western ideals of empowerment which ‘may not easily translate into community reintegration and acceptance for the survivor’. Ultimately, focusing on individual change also detracts from the need for structural change, which in turn promotes problems when ‘empowered’ returnees are rejected by their communities (Locke 2010, pp. 112-114).

In an effort to meet the expectations of international donors and secure ongoing funding, anti-trafficking NGOs in Nepal have shifted from a ‘charity approach’ to rehabilitation aimed at meeting women’s basic needs for food, clothing and shelter, to a ‘rights-based approach’ that aims to empower returnees (Locke 2010, p. 112). However, although a rights-based approach may be evident in the rhetoric of NGOs, it is not always realised in practice. For example, NGOs have been
accused of keeping women under tight security and restricting their autonomy while residing in rehabilitation shelters (Joshi 2001; Frederick 2006). It has been claimed that rehabilitation is not always a voluntary process with some rehabilitation centres resembling prisons (Project Parivartan 2006, p. 6). Sanghera (2005, p. 22) further contends that ‘rehabilitation has sometimes meant nothing more than a change of venue of the victim’s incarceration from a brothel to a shelter’.

The involvement of NGOs can also have unintended negative consequences for returnees and thwart their efforts to reintegrate into village live. Community members are likely to assume that if a woman is involved with an anti-trafficking NGO she must have been trafficked (SAHARA & JIT 2004, p. 23). A woman may then be subjected to community ridicule if her association with an anti-trafficking organisation becomes public knowledge (Bowles 2013).

Several feminist writers have argued that anti-trafficking NGOs in Nepal promote the belief that women are safe only if they return to live with their families, marry or reside in an NGO (Joshi 2001; Pearson 2004; Kaufman & Crawford 2011; Lee 2014). These writers are critical of NGOs in Nepal that perpetuate entrenched patriarchal beliefs which reinforce traditional gender roles for women. For example, Joshi (2001) argues that the practices of anti-trafficking organisations in Nepal are heavily influenced by the belief that a woman’s primary role is in the home. Formerly trafficked women are counselled to return to their families and reminded that they are ‘vulnerable and in need of paternalistic protection’ (Joshi 2001, p. 163). Joshi (2001, p. 165) contends that anti-trafficking NGOs further restrict women’s options by maintaining them in a ‘social system that provides them with few opportunities to move on and do anything different’. Traditional gender roles are also partly reinforced by the training typically offered by these NGOs, which includes sewing, cooking and beauty therapy (Lisborg 2009). This in turn limits women’s opportunities for entering and competing in the wider labour market (Kelley 2003, p. 144).

The criticisms levelled at anti-trafficking NGOs in Nepal have similarly been levelled at reintegration programs operating in other countries. For example, Segrave, Milivojevic and Pickering (2009) assessed the rehabilitation and reintegration interventions undertaken by both government and non-government organisations in Serbia and Thailand and concluded that the majority of these programs do not foster women’s independence or adequately consider the broader political and socioeconomic contexts of women’s lives (Segrave et al. 2009). In addition, they are critical of the failure of these organisations to evaluate the outcomes of their services in a meaningful way (Segrave et al. 2009).
The assumption is often made that returnees will want assistance to reintegrate with their families and communities. However, a few studies internationally suggest that in some circumstances previously trafficked women may not identify themselves as trafficking victims or may decline formal assistance (Lisborg 2009; Brunovskis & Surtees 2013; Andrevski, Larsen & Lyneham 2013). Rejecting assistance challenges the dominant framework for understanding sex trafficking that constructs women as victims (O’Dell 2014, p. 62). However, Lisborg (2009) further points out that some returnees may initially reject assistance but then are open to joining a reintegration program at a later point in their lives. In these instances, it is suggested that such programs should be offered ‘when returnees are ready to receive assistance’, which suggests that the timing of assistance is an important consideration when planning reintegration programs (Lisborg 2009, p. 7).

2.8. Barriers to reintegration

The small number of studies that have focused on previously trafficked women’s experiences of return and reintegration all highlight significant barriers to reintegration (Hennink & Simkhada 2004; Adhikari 2011; Jha & Madison 2011; Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012). Hennink and Simkhada (2004) interviewed twelve trafficked Nepalese women about their experiences of return and reintegration and found that societal condemnation and social stigma were major impediments to reintegration. Lack of financial support and social exclusion prompted over half of these women to re-enter sex work in Nepal (Hennick & Simkhada 2004). Not surprisingly, in the context of a patriarchal society such as Nepal, communities often react negatively to returnee women who attempt to reintegrate into village life. Although these women may try to hide their trafficking background, it has been suggested that local people may observe changes in the way the women dress and behave and suspect that the women have been involved in sex work (Fujikura 2001).

A study conducted by KC et al. (2001, p. 2) found that a large number of Nepalese women who returned to their families were not living ‘normal lives’ and were still at risk of sexual exploitation. A major concern was that for many of these women, their current living conditions were reported to be worse than the brothels which they had left (KC et al. 2001). In another study, Buet, Bashford and Basnyat (2012) interviewed 56 returnees and found that poverty, marital dissatisfaction, abuse and health problems were commonly reported experiences. Many of these returnees expressed a preference for living in an urban area rather than their natal village due to community rejection or discrimination. Participants expressed pessimism and anxiety about the future and worried about ending up alone or having no one to care for them (Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012).
Jha and Madison (2011) advance three reasons why returnee women are usually rejected by their family and community: a belief that women who engage in sex work are of poor character; the assumption that all sex workers are infected with HIV; and a pervasive fear that sex workers will pass on HIV to local men. Community pressure may also be placed on families to reject returnees (Mahendra et al. 2001, p. 44).

Notably, the media in Nepal plays an important role in shaping community attitudes to sex trafficking. Stories of sex trafficking often feature in national and local newspapers, NGO newsletters and other media (Fujikura 2001; Kantipurnews 2014a; Kantipurnews 2014b; Poudel 2014). Journalists who cover rescue operations tend to report horrifying stories of abuse and exploitation. Sex trafficking also features in many films, which Baker (2014) points out can reinforce many of the ideologies and myths surrounding trafficking, such as differentiating between innocent victims and those women perceived as being complicit in their own trafficking.

A further barrier to reintegration is the current Nepalese laws and practices concerning citizenship. Sex trafficked women are likely to have difficulties in obtaining citizenship, which in turn makes it difficult for them to secure employment or a sustainable livelihood (Laczo 2003; Poudel, Richardson & Laurie 2009; Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012). In Nepal, citizenship is traditionally passed down from the father to his children. However, because of the stigma associated with sex trafficking, a father may be reluctant to acknowledge the existence of a daughter who has returned from sex work (Laczo 2003). If a returnee lacks the support of her father, she is unlikely to be able to obtain formal citizenship certificate (Poudel, Richardson & Laurie 2009).

Citizenship in Nepal is essential for women in accessing education, training and health services, applying for a passport, opening up a bank account or purchasing assets such as a house or land (Laczo 2003). Without citizenship, women lack the protection of the State and are deprived of their social, economic and political rights. Moreover, they are likely to be exposed to violence, poverty, exploitation or even forced displacement (Forum for Women, Law and Development 2014, p. 3). Richardson, Poudel and Laurie (2009) therefore contend that returnee women’s access to a sustainable livelihood is fundamentally determined by whether they have formal citizenship status.

In summary, these studies highlight four significant issues that returnees face when they return to their families or attempt to resume their lives in their communities: physical and psychological health problems; community rejection and societal stigma; the denial of citizenship rights; and the challenges of maintaining a livelihood. However, little is known about how formerly trafficked women deal with these issues either in the short or long term once they return to Nepal. Currently,
no research has explored the strategies these women use to resume life with their families or reintegrate into their communities. Simkhada (2008, p. 245) therefore argues that further research into the coping strategies used by trafficked women is needed to inform intervention efforts.

2.9. Summary and conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the existing literature on sex trafficking and reintegration from a variety of disciplines. It has canvassed definitional issues surrounding reintegration and critically reviewed the main frameworks for understanding sex trafficking, namely human rights and feminist frameworks. In addition, it has examined the impact of sex trafficking on women and drawn attention to a gap in the extant research on sex trafficked women’s experiences of reintegration.

The literature review revealed the lack of a consensual understanding of reintegration on both a local and international level. What constitutes successful reintegration has equally been subject to multiple interpretations, and the observation was made that how anti-trafficking organisations view successful reintegration may not necessarily be in accord with how survivors of trafficking understand their experiences. In addition, geographical location, along with local social, economic and political conditions, are likely to be key factors in shaping previously trafficked women’s experiences of reintegration.

Human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation is recognised as a violation of human rights. However, despite the existence of various international and national anti-trafficking institutions and laws aimed at protecting the human rights of trafficking survivors and supporting them in the reintegration process, there is a sizable gulf between policy and practice in Nepal. Although most anti-trafficking NGOs endorse a human rights and empowerment model of practice, considerable criticism has been directed at some of these NGOs for their failure to respect the autonomy of returnees and protect their rights.

Feminist analyses of sex trafficking have drawn attention to the structural inequalities and unequal power relations between men and women that underpin sex trafficking. However, despite broad agreement on the factors that promote sex trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women, feminist writers have engaged in debates about the agency of the women concerned and appropriate responses to sex trafficking. Notably, feminist perspectives on reintegration are under-represented in the literature, although more recently some feminist authors have highlighted the utility of intersectionality theory for understanding the experiences of trafficked women. As an analytical
lens, intersectionality has the potential for enriching understandings of women’s experiences of reintegration because it allows for the recognition of multiple, intersecting identities.

For the purposes of this study, it is envisaged that employing both feminist and human rights frameworks for understanding sex trafficking will provide a broader range of insights into returnees’ experiences of reintegration. Intersectionality theory equally has potential for illuminating women’s experiences of reintegration at the individual level. At the same time, the preceding discussion has illuminated the need to view these frameworks in a critical light. Accordingly, rather than privileging one analytical framework, multiple perspectives have been adopted in this thesis.

While anti-trafficking organisations play a key role in assisting survivors return to their families and communities, little is known about the returnees’ experiences once they leave these NGOs. Locating formerly trafficked women can be difficult because most Nepali women are likely to want to keep their involvement with sex work a secret in order to facilitate community acceptance. Most studies on reintegration have relied on data reported by anti-trafficking organisations, sometimes supplemented with interviews with returnees still under their care. The main limitation of these studies is that they lack an indepth understanding of reintegration that privileges the perceptions of returnees rather than the data reported by NGOs. In addition, the operations of these anti-trafficking NGOs have been subjected to critique because of a perceived failure to systematically evaluate outcomes.

The extant research on reintegration suggests that many trafficking victims contend with poverty, ill-health, further abuse and social isolation while also having restricted access to resources once they return to their communities. In the Nepalese context, a lack of access to citizenship may compound these problems and make women vulnerable to re-trafficking. However, little is known about what strategies Nepali women may employ to deal with these issues or minimise their impact on their lives.

In summary, this literature review has illuminated the need to hear directly from trafficked women about their experiences of reintegration. This includes independent returnees who have traditionally been excluded from most studies on sex trafficking. Currently, minimal attention has been given on independent returnees or how they experience reintegration. In addition, little is known about the dynamics surrounding returnees’ family and community relationships, nor the factors that facilitate their integration.
Having identified the dominant themes, definitional issues and debates concerning the reintegration of formerly trafficked women in the literature, the following chapter outlines a methodology for exploring the reintegration experiences of formerly trafficked women in Nepal.
3. Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore sexually trafficked women’s experiences of reintegration after returning to Nepal. The study was guided by one overarching research question:

How do women survivors of sex trafficking experience reintegration?

In addition to the main research question, two sub-questions were posed:

a. What are the barriers to reintegration?

b. What are the supporting factors that promote reintegration?

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The first section provides an overview of the research design and method, participant selection and recruitment. The second section documents the field work conducted for the study and provides some background information on the research participants. This section includes a discussion on the researcher’s role and relationship with the participants. The third section outlines the methods employed for data management and analysis before giving consideration to the trustworthiness of the study. Following on from this discussion, the ethical issues associated with conducting the research are considered. The chapter concludes with an overview of the limitations of the methodology.

3.2. Research design

As this study is concerned with exploring women’s experiences of reintegration, a qualitative approach was used to elicit their stories. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p. 12), the central concern of qualitative research is ‘the world of lived experience, for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture’. It was anticipated that a qualitative approach would allow the researcher to better understand and contextualise the reintegration process from the perspective of the participants (Minichiello & Kottler 2010). More specifically, it enabled the researcher to explore complex issues surrounding reintegration and develop analytic perspectives that speak directly to the everyday lives of formerly trafficked women (Miller & Glassner 1997).
Nightingale (2010, p. 3) observes that ‘there is tremendous ethnic, religious, linguistic and topographical diversity in Nepal making generalisations about “Nepalese women” (or caste) inappropriate.’ In this context, another benefit of adopting a qualitative approach was that it allowed the researcher to explore the influence of various intersecting factors such as caste, culture, place of living and health status on the women’s experiences of reintegration. The following section describes the particular interviewing method employed in this study to elicet the women’s stories of reintegration.

3.3. Method

This study utilised an indepth semi-structured interview format with a responsive style of interviewing to elicit sexually trafficked women’s experiences of reintegration. The Responsive Interviewing Model is informed by interpretative constructionist philosophy and recognises that the interview is co-constructed (Rubin & Rubin 2005, p. 30). It acknowledges that both interviewer and interviewee are individuals with distinct biographies, interests and experiences, and does not assume that the interviewer is neutral (Rubin & Rubin 2005). The responsive model of interviewing was employed because of its flexibility in adapting the process to informants’ needs. Rather than posing structured questions, open-ended questions and prompts are used to elicit depth and detail (Rubin & Rubin 2005). Employing a responsive style of interviewing requires the researcher to be self-aware and reflect on how her own expectations might influence the interview process. Accordingly, the issue of researcher reflexivity is taken up later in this chapter.

An interview guide was prepared with several main questions and various topics to be explored in-depth (see appendix I). While this served as a general guide to direct the discussion with the participants, as each interview progressed the topics were followed up according to their appropriateness. For example, all of the women had pursued different paths of reintegration, so it was not appropriate to ask the same question of each participant. In order to fully understand each woman’s experience of reintegration, first it was important to hear her story about how she was trafficked, how she managed to leave the brothel, and how she was repatriated to Nepal. An understanding of these events was important to understanding each woman’s experience of reintegration.
3.4. The interview guide

The following topics were explored with each participant:

♦ Biographical data
♦ Factors behind trafficking
♦ Release mode from the brothel
♦ Repatriation strategy
♦ Expectations of going back home
♦ Experience of reintegration
♦ Ongoing livelihood and future plans

During the interviews, these topics were used to guide the discussion and to keep the participants focused on the research questions (Rubin & Rubin 1995, p. 197). The relevance of these particular topics is described below.

Biographical data was gathered about each participant’s age, caste, ethnicity, linguistic and cultural background, geographical location and family background. It was important to obtain this information in order to explore the relevance of these factors for each participant’s experience of reintegration. In order to understand individual women’s experiences of reintegration, it was also essential to have some knowledge of the context in which each woman was trafficked. For instance, one participant was trafficked with her one year old son by her husband. After she was rescued from the brothel and repatriated by an anti-trafficking organisation, her husband was sentenced to prison. In this context, the factors behind her trafficking had a significant impact on her experience of family reintegration.

Voluntary return is considered to be key to sustainable reintegration (Brookings-Bern 2007), so understanding how each woman was released or escaped from the brothel was important to ascertaining whether her return was voluntary or not. Asking the women about how they were repatriated to Nepal was similarly important in gaining an understanding of their experience of reintegration. In some cases, the repatriation strategy had a negative effect on the women’s experiences of returning home. For example, one participant was rescued by an anti-trafficking organisation and her story was subsequently published in the local newspaper before her
repatriation. Once she returned to Nepal she was rejected by her family due to the publicity surrounding her case.

### 3.5. Selection of participants

Participants for this research were recruited via a combination of snowball sampling and a purposive sampling strategy. Women who have been sexually trafficked often attempt to remain invisible in the community and are therefore hard to identify (Simkhada 2008). Accordingly, a snowball approach was identified as the best way to make contact with returnee women because recruitment occurs through a process of referrals (O’Leary 2004).

The researcher first made contact with three anti-trafficking non-government organisations in Kathmandu who work with formerly trafficked women: ABC Nepal, Maiti Nepal and Shakti Samuha. Two of these NGOs, ABC Nepal and Maiti Nepal provide shelter and support for trafficked women, locate their families and make arrangements for their return, and accommodate those women who cannot return home or are rejected by their families. The third NGO, Shakti Samuha, was founded by sex trafficking survivors in Nepal in 1996. In addition to supporting survivors of trafficking, Shakti Samuha actively involves survivors in their awareness raising campaigns in both urban and rural locations (MWCSW, Shakti Samuha & AATWIN 2014, pp. 14-15). In conducting these campaigns Shakti Samuha staff often connect with formerly trafficked women who returned to their villages without the assistance of NGOs. This organisation was instrumental in assisting the researcher to make contact with these ‘hard to reach’ women whose experiences of reintegration are under-represented in the research literature. Locating and interviewing this group of women was possible only through the support of Shakti Samuha.

In planning the study, it was originally proposed to recruit participants using the following criteria:

- Repatriated Nepalese women aged between 18-30 years who were previously trafficked to India;
  and
- Who had been back living in Nepal for not more than five years.
The researcher sought to recruit a diverse sample in terms of caste, ethnicity and geographical location. However, women who were not from a Nepalese background or who were involved in prostitution through inside-country trafficking were excluded from the study.

A five year time frame was nominated because it was anticipated that if a longer time frame was used the experience of reintegration may not be as fresh in the participants’ minds and they would be unable to readily recall what happened and how they felt. However, after conducting the first five interviews, it became apparent that reintegration is an ongoing process that can span decades. Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggest that it is a common practice in qualitative research to modify and change the research plan after considering the realities of the field. Consequently, the selection criteria were broadened in response to these observations in the field. Women over 18 years were invited to participate in the study and no limitation was placed on the time frame of their return.

Due to the ethical issues that arise from conducting research with children, it was important to ensure that no underage participants took part in the research. A further problem in the recruitment process was that most of the participants were unsure of their actual age. This may be due to their illiteracy, lacking knowledge in numeracy and the fact that Nepal does not have a well organised system for recording births. In some cases it was therefore necessary to estimate the women’s ages by considering other factors such as years spent in school, the amount of time spent in the brothel and the ages of their children. For instance one of the participants said that she was trafficked before starting her first menstruation cycle and, considering her other circumstances, it was estimated that she was twelve years old at the time she was trafficked.

Although snowball sampling was the primary method of recruitment used in this study, purposive sampling was also used to ensure that women from different settings were represented in the sample. A purposive sampling strategy provides important information from a particular setting, persons or events (Maxwell 1996). In order to explore a range of women’s experiences of reintegration, the participants were purposively recruited from three different settings.

I: Women living in a village setting: As discussed above, this group of women were primarily located with the support of Shakti Samuha. In total, five women were interviewed from this group: three of these women were living with their husbands, one was living with her parents, and one woman was widowed and living with her children.

II: Women living in rehabilitation centres: Rehabilitation centres for sexually trafficked women are usually run by anti-trafficking organisations. These centres provide shelter for the trafficked women
once they have returned from India. Women living with HIV and those women who are unable to return to their original families also reside in these rehabilitation centres. Seven women living in three different rehabilitation centres were interviewed from this group.

III: Women living independently: Initially it was difficult to recruit this group of returnees. However, with the assistance of the anti-trafficking organisations, contact was made with a small number of women who were asked if they knew of other women living in similar circumstances. Eight women were interviewed from this group: four were single or separated and four were living with their husbands at the time of interview. The four married women had been living independently in Kathmandu for some time prior to their marriage.

3.6. Fieldwork

The fieldwork for this research was conducted over a five month period from July to December 2009 in two sites in Nepal: the Kathmandu valley and the villages in the Nuwakot District. Nepal is a politically unstable country and gaining access to a ‘hidden’ population in remote villages only accessible by foot because of the difficult geographical terrain posed particular challenges. An additional challenge I faced as a researcher was that many Nepalese people have a limited understanding of research, so that they do not readily cooperate with researchers (Sthapit 2008). In recognition of these challenges, I followed the process suggested by Gubrium and Holstein (1997) for data collection that includes gaining entry to the field, establishing rapport and building trust with the gatekeepers and the participants.

First, I had to establish relationships with the anti-trafficking organisations and seek gatekeeper approval before I was able to start recruiting participants. WHO guidelines (2003) for interviewing trafficked women recommend that the safest way to make contact with these women is through the local organisations known to them and that they trust. In recognition of this, I made a personal approach to the director of each organisation after I arrived in Nepal. Building relationships with senior staff from these organisations was made easier by the fact that I had previously worked with one of these NGOs as a caseworker. Formal gatekeeper approval was gained from three anti-trafficking organisations (see appendix VI), who were instrumental in assisting me to recruit participants for the study.

The anti-trafficking organisations identified women who fitted the selection criteria and informed them about the study, and also asked them to identify other women who might be interested in
being interviewed. If they were interested in participating in the study, the women were then invited to meet the researcher in person. At this initial meeting the researcher explained the study in detail and went through the information sheet and answered any questions they had about the study. If a woman agreed to participate in an interview, a meeting was organised with the researcher with the assistance of the caseworker concerned. Each participant was given the option of having a support person present during the interview. In recognition of the time given by the participants, an honorarium of 200 Nepalese Rupees was paid to each woman.

As mentioned earlier, the field work was conducted in two separate sites. In order to reach the villages of Nuwakot it was necessary to first take a long bus trip from Kathmandu and then trek on foot. Entering local villages with staff from the NGOs helped me to build trust and rapport with local residents and participants. Local community members and village guides assisted me in several ways. In particular, they helped me find accommodation in local houses and often provided me with food. It is very rare to find hotels in rural villages of Nepal, so this kind of assistance was vital.

My field work was at times hindered by the political tensions in Nepal. While in Nuwakot, I was detained by a local Maoist leader and his group of supporters. During that time I was asked questions about my personal background, my residency status and my research. This Maoist leader then insisted that I interview him and record the interview on my digital recorder. I complied with his request but this data does not form part of the current study.

3.7. Conducting the interviews

The interviews were mostly conducted in the offices of the anti-trafficking organisations or the participants’ homes. Three participants requested that the interviews take place at a local motel. With the women’s permission, the interviews were audiotaped. Finding a private space to interview women in the villages of Nuwakot was a more challenging experience. Here, the women preferred to give their interviews inside their houses. However, due to the small living area it was difficult to find a private place to speak with the women. In some cases the participant’s family members frequently interrupted the interview. In these instances, it was necessary to temporarily halt the interview.

As highlighted in the literature review, the experience of being sexually trafficked is recognised as a traumatic life event. Asking about such private matters required spending time gaining the women’s
trust and building rapport with them. Most of the participants became emotional while talking about their experiences. Some participants cried while remembering their past lives and reflecting on their ongoing circumstances. Others reacted aggressively when talking about their experiences with traffickers, brothel owners and even the people in their own communities. Some participants were initially suspicious and repeatedly asked about the privacy of their data. Acknowledging the sensitive nature of the interviews and the vulnerable population being interviewed, the researcher needed to be aware of the practical realities associated with the women’s trafficking experiences. Reassuring participants about the privacy of the data and providing emotional support during the interviews was therefore essential to ensure their wellbeing and sense of safety during the interview process.

Many of the women had a limited understanding of what an interview is as they had never been interviewed before. Consequently, explaining the interview process to these women and ensuring smooth conversation was sometimes difficult. In order to optimise their comfort, the women were encouraged to tell their stories in their own way. For example, one of the participants wanted to start her story from a particular point in time, as from the point that she was abducted by Maoist forces and recruited into their army. This incident preceded her experiences of being trafficked for sex work.

The interviews were conducted in Nepali, which is the researcher’s first language. Most of the women in the study spoke their own ethnic language as their first language and learnt Hindi (one of the official languages in India) after they were trafficked to India. While the majority of participants had a good understanding of Nepali, one woman only commenced learning Nepali after returning to Nepal, which meant that for this participant the interview was conducted in her third language. This posed some difficulties during the interview process and I had to adopt a number of additional strategies to ensure that this participant understood the questions. These strategies included modifying the questioning format and simplifying the questions, and on some occasions posing questions where I identified several possible responses. On other occasions, I used closed-ended questions where the respondent only had to answer yes or no.

3.8. Participants’ backgrounds

Twenty women who were previously trafficked to India for sex work and then later repatriated to Nepal participated in this study. They had been residing back in Nepal for varying periods of time
ranging from one month to twenty years. The women were aged between eighteen and forty-five years. The women came from eleven different districts of Nepal: Morang; Rautahat; Dharan; Udayapur; Palpa; Gorkha; Chitwan; Lalitpur; Makwanpur; Sindhupalchowk and Nuwakot. The majority of participants (nine) were originally from the Nuwakot District. Most of the women (nineteen) were trafficked between the ages of ten and twenty years. One participant was trafficked when she was nine years old. The participants came from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Table two at the end of this section provides a brief summary of the participants’ marital status, the context of their trafficking and their current living place.

Most of the women (nine) indicated that they had been trafficked as a result of being betrayed by close family members and friends. Seven women described being lured by traffickers with the promise of better employment and anticipated that they would be doing work such as dishwashing. However, none of these women were informed that they were going to India for the purposes of sex work. They described their traffickers as local people from their neighbourhood or surrounding villages. Only four women reported that they were abducted.

Ten of the respondents had never attended school. Four women commenced primary school but did not complete their primary education. Three of the women completed their primary schooling and subsequently enrolled in secondary school but did not complete their studies. One woman had enrolled in school after being repatriated back to Nepal; she was thirty-four years old at the time of the interview and was completing year ten. Only two of the women had completed the SLC level (School Leaving Certificate – equivalent to grade 10).

The following table provides a brief summary of the participants’ trafficking, circumstances, current marital status, and present living arrangements. Each participant is identified by a pseudonym and these names are used in the findings chapters to identify each participant:

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3 These figures are based on estimates because many of the women had only basic numeracy skills. Consequently, they found it difficult to clearly nominate the length of time they had been away from Nepal.
Table 1-1: Participants' trafficking circumstances, marital status, and current living arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Context of trafficking</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Current living arrangements at time of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nayanshi</td>
<td>Abducted by known person</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Residing in a rehabilitation centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sita</td>
<td>Betrayed by a close family member</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Living with a child in city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunita</td>
<td>Abducted by known person</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>Residing in a rehabilitation centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Betrayed by a close family member</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>Residing in a rehabilitation centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chameli</td>
<td>Lured for better employment</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>Residing in a rehabilitation centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepika</td>
<td>Betrayed by a close family member</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>Residing in a rehabilitation centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pramila</td>
<td>Abducted by a stranger</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Living independently in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thuli</td>
<td>Lured for better employment</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>Living with children in village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailee</td>
<td>Lured for better employment</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Living with husband and children in village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarala</td>
<td>Lured for better employment</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Living with husband and children in village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamala</td>
<td>Lured for better employment</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Living with husband in village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1-2 Participants’ trafficking circumstances, marital status, and current living arrangements continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Context of trafficking</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Current living arrangements at time of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambika</td>
<td>Betrayed by a friend</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>Living independently in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smiriti</td>
<td>Lured for better employment</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Living independently in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rama</td>
<td>Betrayed by work colleagues</td>
<td>‘Rakhel’/Single</td>
<td>Living independently in the city with a child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanu</td>
<td>Abducted by known person</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Living with husband in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poonam</td>
<td>Betrayed by a close family member</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Living with her husband in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malati</td>
<td>Betrayed by work colleagues</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Residing in a rehabilitation centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sushila</td>
<td>Betrayed by a friend</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Residing in a rehabilitation centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sila</td>
<td>Betrayed by a close family member</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Living with husband and child in the city</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 A ‘rakhel’ is a woman who lives with a man who already has a wife. In this situation the man generally pays her living expenses, but the relationship is kept secret from other people.
3.9. Researcher reflexivity

Qualitative researchers recognise that there is no single interpretative truth and that the researcher plays a key role in constructing the findings (Atkinson 1990; Denzin & Lincoln 2003). Accordingly, it is acknowledged that the researcher’s biography, cultural background, values, position and awareness would have influenced not only the research process, but also the production of knowledge. Qualitative research does not require the researcher to drop her own cultural assumptions and values. However, it does require the researcher to be self-aware (Rubin & Rubin 1995). As Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p. 49) point out, qualitative research reproduces a colonizing discourse of ‘Other’, where the ‘Other’ is interpreted through the eyes and cultural standards of the researcher.

Typically, reflexivity in research refers to ‘an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining “outside of” one’s subject matter while conducting research’ (Willig 2001, p. 10). Below, consideration is given to the researcher’s epistemological and personal reflexivity in the context of this particular study.

My previous involvement in an anti-trafficking organisation in Nepal as a case supervisor and experiences working with sexually trafficked women was the impetus for this research. My work role in this NGO was primarily focused on engaging the returnees and conducting assessments. I was also involved in developing a case management system for the organisation. While I was not involved in any activities pertaining directly to reintegration, having grown up in Nepal and being familiar with its social and cultural context, I was aware that sexually trafficked women have a negative image in Nepalese society. Consequently, I was interested in finding out how these women would be treated by their family on their return, after being repatriated from sex work in India. In this regard, my understanding of Nepalese culture and society led me to believe that gender discrimination would be a likely factor that shapes women’s experiences of reintegration.

Furthermore, being a Nepalese woman, I am aware of the caste system and various other social divisions in Nepal. I have observed the differences in women’s roles and social positions that stem from caste membership, ethnicity, level of education, HIV status and geographical location. In this context, I was interested in understanding how sexually trafficked women interpret their experiences and how these various intersecting factors would impact on their experience. Willig (2001) refers to this sort of awareness in researchers as epistemological reflexivity. Epistemological reflexivity encourages the researcher to reflect upon her own assumptions about women and to test those ideas in the field rather than assume their truth.
According to Willig (2001) personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways in which the researcher’s values, experiences, interests, beliefs and social identities have shaped the research. In my own case, I belong to the Brahmin caste, speak Khas-Nepali (a language from the Indo-Aryan family group), have a university education and, more recently, have taken up Australian citizenship. These are all aspects of my identity which potentially influenced my relationship with the participants. The following section explores the researcher-informant relationship in more depth.

3.10. Researcher-informant relationship

As both a researcher and a Nepalese woman, I was regarded as both an insider and an outsider and had to negotiate these roles continually throughout my fieldwork. Miller and Glassner (1997) suggest that one advantage of the researcher being a member of the group under study is that she has the subjective knowledge necessary to understand the participants’ lives and experiences. In this context, being a Nepalese woman who had grown up in Nepal and had a good understanding of the language and culture was helpful in establishing insider relationships with the participants. During the interviews we shared information about the importance and value of our culture and festivals. Being a woman was a further factor that was important in ensuring that the women felt comfortable. Van Ommeren et al. (1999) suggest that female interviewers are more suited to interviewing Nepalese women when discussing sexual matters. During the interviews we shared a common understanding of what it means to be a woman in Nepal, including our roles and responsibilities of being someone’s wife, mother, daughter and daughter-in-law. In most of the interviews we were able to establish a sisterhood relationship. It is common in Nepal to say ‘didi’ (elder sister) and ‘bahinee’ (younger sister) instead of calling each other by name. In most of the interviews the participants called me ‘didi’ and in some cases ‘bahinee’. They allowed me to treat them as sisters, and this relationship was helpful in building trust and rapport with the participants during the interviews.

Although on one level I was recognized as an ‘insider’, on another level I was recognized as an ‘outsider’ because I have lived outside Nepal for the past five years and now have Australian citizenship. In addition, I identified myself as a researcher when meeting the women. While I was familiar with some elements of the lifestyles of the women I interviewed, I have not been a victim of sex trafficking. My understanding of these women’s experiences was primarily based on my previous work with an anti-trafficking NGO. My accent, language background, education and ethnicity also marked me as an outsider, along with my lack of knowledge of specific local customs.
In some cases the participants treated me as a professional and called me ‘Miss’. In the Nepalese context this means an educated lady who works in a professional field.

Consequently, I was seen as both an insider and an outsider and what status I was accorded also depended on what was happening at the time. For instance, in one case while interviewing a participant in her home in the village, five men suddenly appeared at the house. Later, I was informed that these men were active members of that community and the participant’s father had asked them to verify my identity. They asked me numerous questions about my background; marital status; my husband’s background and my current living place. They also inquired about my affiliation with any anti-trafficking organisations in Nepal. These men suspected that I was a staff member from one of the anti-trafficking organisations, and it became apparent that they had a negative image of anti-trafficking organisations. In this context, I had to constantly verify my identity.

Despite this uncertainty about my status, the majority of women I interviewed spoke readily about their experiences of being trafficked and indicated some relief at being able to talk about it openly to someone from outside their community. Cwikel and Hobin (2005) similarly found in an earlier study on sex trafficking that most of the women they interviewed were grateful for the opportunity to tell their stories to a concerned, neutral listener.

3.11. Transcribing and translating the interviews

The audiotaped interviews were fully transcribed in Nepali and then translated into English. The researcher completed both the transcriptions and translations, which had the added benefit of enabling immersion in the data (Bailey 1994). Translation is recognised as a subtle and complex process (Marshall & Rossman 2006). Identifying equivalent words and expressions that represent the semantics and concepts of the target language is difficult and at times impossible (Van Ommeren et al. 1999). As a translator I needed to first discover the meaning behind the text in the source language and try to produce the same meaning in the target language.

Three approaches to translation have been identified in the literature: translation at the level of the word; translation at the level of the sentence; and conceptual translation (Riazi 2002). In this study, the interviews were translated at the level of the sentence and the concept. Riazi (2002) suggests that a difference in the syntax of the source and target languages is a major problem in translation at the sentence level. As a translator, I experienced similar difficulties while translating the interviews.
into English. For example, in Nepali sentences the subject generally comes first, followed by the object and then the verb. However, in English the subject comes first, followed by the verb and then the object. In these situations, the sentence structure was modified to make it consistent with the grammatical rules and word order of the target language without destroying its meaning. The following sentence provides an example of translation at sentence level:

*Mero naam Jyoti ho.* (Nepali sentence)

My (*mero*) name (*naam*) Jyoti is (*ho*). (Word to word translation from Nepali to English)

My name is Jyoti.

A further challenge was that during the interviews, the participants sometimes used slang, local idioms and proverbs. In these cases, a literal translation would not have captured the meaning of these expressions so conceptual translation was carried out. In conceptual translation, the unit of translation is neither the word nor the sentence; rather it is the concept (Riazi 2002). To ensure that the translation faithfully conveyed the participant’s meaning, I provided equivalent concepts and further explanation of ideas. The following extract from an interview demonstrates the inadequacy of translation at the word or sentence level:

‘No one can imagine how terrible we are experiencing ...; our life is like our proverb ... that *khukuri* and *aachano*, *khukuri ko chot achano lai ke tha hoina?’

In the above sentence ‘*khukuri*’ means butcher’s knife, ‘*chot*’ means pain and ‘*aachano*’ means a traditional meat cutting board made from a wide tree trunk. A literal translation of the sentence reads: ‘Butcher’s knife doesn’t know the pain of the cutting board’. Here, the participant is expressing her frustration that no one can understand her feelings; to understand her actual suffering, one must have lived through similar circumstances.

In those instances where Nepali words lacked an English equivalent, the Nepali word was retained in the translation and an explanatory note added. In addition, I tried to capture the various emotions the women expressed during the interviews in words. For example, I noted in the transcriptions when the participants were laughing, crying, angry or frustrated, as well as when they demonstrated an unwillingness to answer a question. The following extract provides an example of the translation of some of these emotions:
[Starts laughing] *I followed him [trafficker] to do a dishwashing job in Kathmandu but he sent me to that place to wash those sorts of dishes* [satirical expression for prostitution]. *He should go to hell!* [raises her voice and uses an angry tone].

In the situation where the researcher is both the interviewer and the translator, the issue of the trustworthiness of the translation arises. In this context, it is acknowledged that researcher subjectivity can influence how the interviews are constructed and how the translation has been carried out. Riessman (cited in Miller & Glassner 1997, p. 101) points out that because ‘the story is being told to a particular person; it might have taken a different form if someone else were the listener’. Similarly for this research, if the translation had been conducted by a person other than the researcher it is likely that the story would not be reproduced in exactly the same way. Temple and Edward (2002) point out that language carries the values, beliefs and political meanings of a particular culture or society and that meaning cannot simply be reproduced through the process of translation. Further, because a language reflects a particular understanding of culture and context, it is conceivable that a translation can never entirely capture the original meaning (Chaudhari 1999, p. 77). Hence, there is no one correct translation and it is not possible to offer one definitive translation (Bassnett 1991; Temple & Edward 2002).

Nonetheless, despite these issues and difficulties in translation, the researcher attempted to be as rigorous as possible while reproducing the participants’ voices during the translation process. Various strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of translation. As mentioned previously, the words and phrases which were too difficult to translate because of a lack of equivalence in English, were reproduced in Nepali and explanatory notes used to clarify their meaning. Following Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) suggestion, the audio-recorded interviews, the transcriptions, and the conventions used in the transcriptions and translations were all documented and form part of an audit trail. The audit trail enables the verification of the researcher’s logic and assists the reader to determine whether the translation is credible.

3.12. Data management, coding and analysis

The Qualitative Data Analysis software ‘QSR NVivo 9’ was used to manage and code the data. Nvivo was identified as an appropriate data management tool because of its capacity for within-case and cross-case analysis (Bazely 2007). The transcribed interviews were imported into NVivo. Descriptive coding was first used to document demographic details and the circumstances of each woman’s trafficking, including how she was released or escaped from the brothel and how she
returned to Nepal. An appreciation of these factors was considered crucial to understanding the women’s experiences of reintegration and also enabled identification of some basic patterns in the data. For example, this descriptive coding revealed that while eleven participants returned to Nepal with the assistance of anti-trafficking organisations, nine of the women had returned to Nepal independently. This then allowed the researcher to compare the experiences of these two groups of women to see if they revealed any significant differences.

Open coding was subsequently used to explore the research questions and elicit themes emerging from the data. Open or ‘initial coding’ is primarily inductive; it is advantageous for following up on analytical leads and is provisional rather than fixed (Saldana 2009, pp. 81-85). Accordingly, emerging ideas were coded and then revised or expanded as necessary. By way of example, it became apparent after reviewing several transcripts that the returnee women experienced pronounced barriers to reintegration once they tried to re-establish themselves in their former communities. These women described their neighbours as being critical of their return, with some even being abusive, so these reactions were coded under the node ‘barriers to reintegration’. However, as coding progressed it became evident that community rejection also resulted in social isolation and exclusion, so another node was created to reflect this idea. Similarly, when scrutinising the text for how the women made sense of their experiences, it appeared that many of them had adopted fatalistic thinking, often referring to ideas such as sin, fate and karma. A node was then developed to reflect these ideas which were further refined as additional transcripts were reviewed.

The coding process therefore allowed the researcher to track and link ideas derived from the data and engage in a process of constant comparison (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Notably, the coding process was circular rather than linear with the researcher going back to the data to further test some ideas and revise the coding structure once data analysis commenced (see appendix VII for the Node Structure Report). In addition, I regularly consulted with my advisors to check my interpretation of the data. In qualitative research, it is recognised that the researcher’s subjectivity may lead to overlooking disconfirming data in analysing the findings. In order to address this potential bias, I returned to the data and sought both confirming and disconfirming evidence as a means of validating the findings. For example, in the previous discussion on researcher reflexivity, I mentioned that I had anticipated that gender discrimination would shape women’s experiences of reintegration. In this regard, I scrutinised the data for any evidence that would disconfirm this viewpoint.
This study employed three methods of data analysis: tracking the participants’ experiences over time; identifying themes in relation to supportive factors and barriers to reintegration; and case studies. Surtees (2013, p. 3) argues that it is necessary to take into account the ‘time factor’ to fully understand trafficked women’s experience of reintegration. Accordingly, the women’s experiences were tracked from the time they were trafficked to India to when they returned to Nepal, culminating in their current living situation at the time of interview.

A thematic analysis was seen to be suitable for the purposes of this study because along with identifying repeated patterns of meaning across data, it enables an analysis of the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that underpin individual accounts (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 85). This was important for the purposes of this study in that many of the barriers to reintegration reported by the participants related to structural issues rather than personal shortcomings. Ollenburger and Moore (1992) suggest that an analysis of context and situational factors is vital for understanding and providing a complete picture of women’s experiences.

In addition to tracking the participants’ experience over time and conducting the thematic analysis, the personal narratives of a sub-sample of returnees were analysed in depth and written up as case studies. These three cases were purposively selected to reflect the returnee women’s different living circumstances. They included a woman living with her family in a village, a woman living independently in Kathmandu, and a woman living in an NGO. The theoretical lens which guided the analysis of these case studies is intersectionality, which acknowledges the impact of multiple intersecting identities such as class, religion, ethnicity, age, disability, health status, caste and location on people’s experiences (Bogard, 1999; Riley, 2004; Knudsen, 2005). According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), the strength of case studies is their attention to detail and complexity; they provide in-depth and detailed explorations of individual accounts that allow the reader to interpret and decide the applicability of learning from these cases to other settings.

3.13. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research pertains to how well the study findings are aligned with the mode of research enquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer four criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of research claims: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These issues are discussed below in relation to this study.
Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe a series of techniques for establishing credibility. One of them is the researcher’s prolonged engagement at the research site, along with her understanding of the culture and social setting of the phenomenon being studied. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that such engagement enhances the credibility of the researcher’s interpretation of the data. In the case of the current study, the researcher spent five months in the field and resided in the villages where the women lived while conducting fieldwork.

Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest member-checking as a crucial technique for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research, this was not viable in this study because of the unique sample and context. Most of the women who were interviewed for this study reported that they were illiterate. Consequently it is unlikely that they would have the ability to understand a written account of their experience. A further complicating factor was that much of the field work was conducted in the remote villages of Nuwakot District. To go back to those villages would have involved many hours trekking on foot. The poor infrastructure, difficult geographical conditions and political instability of the country made it impossible to send mail or follow up the women with a phone call. In recognition of these challenges I conducted ‘on the spot’ reflections with the informants in terms of what was said and how they found the interview process (Shenton 2004). This mainly occurred at the end of each interview and is documented.

Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings to other settings. Though qualitative research does not allow for generalising, what is learned from this study can still be useful for other settings (Rossman & Rallis 2003). Along with a thorough description of the methodology and the detailed accounts of the women’s reintegration experiences, the three case studies presented in the findings provide an additional lens to examine the women’s experiences of reintegration at an individual level. This attention to descriptive detail will allow the reader the opportunity to make their own judgement about the validity of the findings and their applicability to other settings (Morris 2006).

Dependability refers to the integrity and the adequacy of the data along with the reliability of the interpretation of the data (Morris 2006, Morrow & Williams 2009). In order to establish dependability in the current study, the methods used to collect and analyse the data have been fully documented in a systematic manner. This includes a transparent account of how the participants were recruited, how the interviews were conducted and later transcribed, and how the data were coded and analysed. This in turn allows for replication of the study by others.
**Confirmability** refers to the honesty and transparency of the research results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify an audit trail as one of the principal techniques for establishing the ‘confirmability’ of qualitative findings. This involves documenting all methodological decisions and keeping a record of coding systems, data analysis procedures and all raw data (Lincoln & Guba 1985). These strategies were all adopted in the current study and have been carefully documented in the methodology chapter and appendices. Reproducing the direct quotes of the participants in the findings chapters is another strategy that has been adopted to enhance confirmability of the research findings as it allows an independent reader to assess the interpretations made by the researcher (Morrow & Williams 2009). In addition, regular feedback was sought from my advisors, particularly on emerging codes, concepts and patterns of findings. This served as a further check on the reliability of the researcher’s interpretations of the data.

### 3.14. Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Behavioural and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee at the University of Queensland. There are no specific guidelines on ethical conduct in research with sexually trafficked women in Nepal. However, the Nepal Health Research Council has formulated National Ethical Guidelines for Health Research in Nepal which involves human participation. These guidelines refer to four ethical principles (NHRC 2001). The first is *respect for the dignity of persons*, which recognises the importance of informed consent and voluntary participation. The second principle is *beneficence* (non-maleficence), which proscribes the deliberate infliction of harm on a person. The third is *justice*, which focuses on the protection of the rights and welfare of vulnerable persons. The final principle is *respect for the environment*, which requires the researcher to demonstrate respect for the social, cultural, and natural heritage of Nepal when conducting research. All of these ethical principles have been given consideration throughout the study, with particular reference to the following issues:

- Voluntary participation
- Informed Consent
- No harm
- Confidentiality
- Anonymity
Voluntary participation: Following the WHO (2003) recommendations for interviewing sexually trafficked women, all of the participants were recruited via referrals from anti-trafficking non-governmental organisations. The organisations made the first contact with the informants to ask them if they were interested in participating in the study. Some of these women were still residing in rehabilitation centres run by these organisations. Stanley, Sieber and Melton (1996) suggest that the concept of voluntary informed consent is difficult to interpret and to apply among women who are in rehabilitation centres because the participants referred by the organisations may perceive little freedom of choice. Therefore, to ensure that the participation of participants was voluntary, each woman was given the opportunity to discuss any concerns or fears she had about participating in an interview with the researcher before proceeding any further. The women were also informed that they did not have to attend the interview and that they could terminate the interview at any time without needing to offer any justification.

Informed consent: Gatekeeper organisations and potential participants were fully informed about the aims and nature of the study and what was required of them. The participant’s information sheet and consent form were translated in a culturally appropriate way into Nepali, and later checked by a qualified Nepalese translator for accuracy. WHO (2003) guidelines for interviewing trafficked women were followed in order to obtain the informed consent of participants with poor literacy. The researcher spent considerable time explaining the reason for the interview and what was to be discussed, as well as what the data were to be used for. Verbal informed consent was obtained from those participants with poor literacy or who did not wish to sign a consent form and, with the participants’ permission, their consent was audiotaped. Tsutsumi et al. (2008) similarly employed verbal consent procedures in their study on trafficked women in Nepal because of the participants’ low literacy and their distrust of written consent forms.

No harm: WHO (2003) recognises that women who have escaped from trafficking situations may still be vulnerable to harm, as may be their family or friends. Therefore, prior to seeking an interview the possible risks entailed for each woman were assessed with the assistance of the concerned organisations. For example, part of this risk assessment focused on how approaching an informant may be perceived by her family and community. The gate-keeping organisations were consulted for advice about which women may not be suitable to participate in the study on the basis of their mental health status. Those women who were assessed as exhibiting heightened symptoms of anxiety or trauma were excluded from the study.

Given the sensitivity of the topic and the social stigma attached to sex trafficking, it was anticipated that some of the questions asked by the interviewer may illicit feelings of discomfort and distress.
In order to minimise such distress participants were informed from the outset that the focus of the study was their experience of returning home rather than the trafficking experience itself. They were also informed that they did not have to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable. Each participant was provided with the option of having a case worker or other support person present at the interview. Some of the women chose to have an NGO worker present and in other cases they chose to have a close family member present during the interviews. The respondents’ reactions were monitored during the interview, and if they appeared to be uncomfortable or the interview conditions became potentially unsafe (for example, if there were interruptions by other people), the researcher immediately stopped the interview.

The informants were provided with information about support services available. In addition, they were encouraged to make contact with their case worker and the anti-trafficking organisation that referred them if they did experience any negative feelings or reactions such as anxiety after the interview. The participants were also informed that they could contact the researcher through the anti-trafficking organisation that had initially referred them.

Anonymity: Sexually trafficked women are considered to be a vulnerable group, and for this reason protecting the women’s privacy and maintaining their anonymity is crucial. The research elicited stories from the women which might not be favourable for them if this information became known in their community. Accordingly, every attempt was made to protect the privacy of the women. All interviews were conducted in a private place and time of the woman’s choosing. Fifteen interviews were conducted inside the NGOs under the indirect supervision of these organisations. Three interviews were conducted inside a local motel and the remaining two interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes. Any potential identifying material—including names of organisations, place of residence, current work place and the names of traffickers—were removed from the transcripts. As suggested by Cwikel and Hoban (2005), participants were also given the option of using a pseudonym when signing consent forms.

Confidentiality: Ensuring confidentiality of data was crucial to protect the participants from unwanted exposure. WHO (2003) recommends that protecting confidentiality is essential to ensuring both a woman’s safety and the quality of the information obtained from the interview. In this regard the women’s personal details were sufficiently altered on the transcripts to prevent the identification of any particular participant. All the consent forms, audiotapes and transcripts were kept in a securely locked filing cabinet and this data was only accessible to the researcher. Passwords for any electronic data ensured additional security.
3.15. Limitations of the study

There are a number of limitations to this study that relate to the sample, the time frame for the study, language factors, generalisability and the interpretation of the findings. These issues are examined below.

Participants were primarily contacted and referred from NGOs who work with trafficked women. Consequently, it is likely that this group was over-represented in the sample. However, a sample of eight independent returnees was obtained. A further limitation of the sample is that not all caste and ethnic groups were represented in the sample. The predominant caste and ethnic groups represented in the sample were Brahmin, Chhetris and Tamang. However, it would be impossible to recruit a representative sample of formerly trafficked women given that so little is known about these women and their activities.

Reintegration is recognised as an ongoing process but this study focused on the women’s experiences of reintegration at only one point in time. In addition, it is not possibly to verify the accuracy of the women’s accounts or their memory recall. While a longitudinal study may have captured the participants’ experiences at different points in time, this type of study was not feasible due to geographical, travel and time constraints. Nonetheless, the study has provided insight into the experiences of those women who have been living in Nepal for the past two to twenty-two years since their repatriation, which also allows for some understanding of reintegration over varying lengths of time.

Another limitation of the study relates to language factors. Some participants had to use a second language rather than their mother tongue to communicate with the researcher during the interviews. This means that, depending on their level of fluency in their second language, these participants may not have been able to fully express their views to the researcher. Furthermore, the interviews were then translated into English which always runs the risk of loss of contextual meaning (Bassnett 1991).

In qualitative research, findings from one context cannot be generalised to another (Guba & Lincoln 1989). Consequently, in this study, the phenomenon of reintegration can be understood only in relation to the group of women studied. Nonetheless, it may be possible to illuminate and extrapolate key themes relating to women’s experiences of reintegration that may be applicable to similar situations (Hoepfl 1997).
Finally, although a qualitative approach was identified as the most appropriate method to explore trafficked women’s experiences of reintegration, the findings do not provide a mirror reflection of the women’s experiences. Interview responses are not the same as authentic experience (Silverman 2000). Despite these limitations, it is suggested that the findings do provide insight into the meanings women attribute to their experiences of reintegration. Given that, to date, little research has been conducted in this area, such insights may be important in informing further research into women’s experiences of reintegration.
### Table 3: Participants' Information Chart

**Participants Information Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Being Trafficked Living In</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village - With Family (13)</td>
<td>[Nayanshi, Sita, Deepika, Thuli, Mailee, Samjana, Sarala, Chameli, Pramila, Poonam, Sanu, Malati &amp; Kamala]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City - With Husband, Friends or Relatives (7)</td>
<td>[Sunita, Maya, Sushila, Sila, Rama, Ambika &amp; Smiriti]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trafficked to Indian Brothels (20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode of Release From Indian Brothels (20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release (3)</td>
<td>[Thuli, Samjana &amp; Kamala]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue (9)</td>
<td>[Nayanshi, Sita, Sunita, Deepika, Chameli, Sushila, Poonam, Sanu &amp; Malati]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape (8)</td>
<td>[Maya, Mailee, Sarala, Pramila, Sila, Rama, Ambika &amp; Smiriti]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repatriated to Nepal (20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO Initiative (12)</td>
<td>[Nayanshi, Sita, Sunita, Maya, Deepika, Chameli, Sushila, Pramila, Poonam, Sanu, Malati &amp; Smiriti]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Initiative (8)</td>
<td>[Thuli, Mailee, Samjana, Sarala, Sila, Rama, Ambika &amp; Kamala]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to Family (18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from NGO (10)</td>
<td>[Nayanshi, Maya, Deepika, Chameli, Sushila, Pramila, Poonam, Sanu, Malati &amp; Smiriti]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Initiative (8)</td>
<td>[Thuli, Mailee, Samjana, Sarala, Sila, Rama, Ambika &amp; Kamala]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Returned to Family (2)</td>
<td>[Sunita &amp; Sita]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Place &amp; Marital Status at the Time of Interview (20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Living in NGO (3)</td>
<td>[Nayanshi, Sushila &amp; Malati]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married Living in Kathmandu (4)</td>
<td>[Sita, Sila, Poonam &amp; Sanu]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated from Husband &amp; Living in NGO (4)</td>
<td>[Sunita, Maya, Deepika &amp; Chameli]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married Living in Family in Village (4)</td>
<td>[Thuli, Mailee, Sarala &amp; Kamala]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Living with Parents in Village (1)</td>
<td>[Nayanshi]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Independently Living in Kathmandu (2)</td>
<td>[Pramila, Rama &amp; Smiriti]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated from Husband &amp; Living Independently in Kathmandu (1)</td>
<td>[Ambika]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Chapter Four: The journey Home: Leaving Brothel Life and Returning to Nepal

4.1. Introduction

The findings presented in this chapter aim to illuminate the women’s initial experiences of leaving brothel life and returning to Nepal. The first part of this chapter provides a brief overview of the women’s perceptions of life in the brothel. An appreciation of the realities of brothel life is important in understanding how these experiences continued to impact the women’s day to day lives once they returned to Nepal. These experiences constitute a range of human rights violations. The stark contrast between the women’s brutal treatment in the brothels and their previous way of life in Nepal appeared to be the main impetus for many of them to actively resist sex work, with some attempting to escape the brothel. Accordingly, the findings in this chapter reveal the women’s resilience and capacity to exercise their agency, albeit in a constrained fashion, in the process of their return to Nepal. Resilience is defined as ‘successful adaptation to life tasks in the face of social disadvantage or highly adverse conditions’ (Windle 1999, p. 163). The idea of resilience has been employed by researchers to account for why some individuals appear to be able to draw on their own coping skills, dispositions and resources to survive and even positively adapt to adverse life events (Rutter 2012).

The second part of the chapter describes how the women eventually exited the brothel via escape, rescue or voluntary release. After managing to leave the brothel eleven participants were repatriated to Nepal with the assistance of both Indian and Nepalese NGOs, while the other nine women returned to Nepal independently. In the case of displaced populations, it is recognised that the repatriation process can facilitate or undermine successful reintegration (UNHCR 2004). Moreover, a coordinated and victim-centered approach to repatriation and rehabilitation is believed to be critical to the successful reintegration of formerly trafficked persons (UN. GIFT 2008). The findings from this study demonstrate that the treatment the women received from social welfare agencies involved in their repatriation and rehabilitation had a direct bearing on their experiences of initially returning to their family and village. In many cases, the women experienced further human rights violations or were not consulted about decisions that ultimately led to detrimental outcomes. In contrast, those women who returned to Nepal independently were able to exercise a degree of autonomy, but, unsupported, were also vulnerable to further abuse on the journey home.

4.2. Life in the brothel

While brothel experiences have been widely researched and are not the main focus of this study, some understanding of the participants’ perceptions of brothel life is necessary in order to understand the process of reintegration. More specifically, the women’s experiences of forced sex
work had a significant long term impact on their physical and psychological health, which made it difficult for them to fit back into family and community life after returning to Nepal.\(^5\) As many of the women remarked, they returned to Nepal as ‘different’ women.

It is important to note that being isolated from family and friends, the women were largely dependent on their traffickers and brothel owners for their survival. This forced dependence is recognised as a significant factor in ‘breaking down’ trafficked women’s initial resistance to sex work (Hodge & Lietz 2007). Many of the participants in this study were made further dependent on their brothel owners because of their inability to speak Hindi, the national language of India, which often compromised their ability to communicate with others in the brothel or seek assistance from external agencies.

All participants described incidents of severe physical and sexual abuse while living in the brothels. Additionally, many of the women were subject to degrading treatment, such as being stripped naked or made to observe extreme acts of violence. These forms of abuse and degradation, which have been equated with torture, are commonly used by brothel owners and traffickers to force compliance with sex work (Sarka, Bal, Mukherjee, Chakraborty, Saha, Ghosh & Parsons 2008). Other tactics used by some brothel staff to subdue the women were forced alcohol consumption and drugging.

The participants reported that physical abuse by their brothel owners, and in some cases by their clients, was more frequent in the early days of brothel life when the women were actively resisting sex work. Commonly reported forms of physical abuse included beatings, cigarettes burns and receiving electric shocks. Below, Sita describes how, after being subject to multiple forms of severe physical abuse, she believed she was going to die:

*Too much punishment made my body numb. The [brothel owner] burnt me with cigarettes; they put an electrical current on me and I nearly died.* (Sita)

Many participants recollected that observing violent acts and torture had been part of their life in the brothel. Some women were regularly threatened with ‘tejab khanaune’ [acid attack]. Sunita wept when describing how she was restrained and forced to witness the murder of her best friend in the

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\(^5\)The ongoing impact of brothel life on the women once they returned to Nepal and how this affected their physical and psychological health is examined in Chapter 6.
brothel. At the time of interview, this catastrophic experience still intruded into her thoughts and caused her to experience disturbed sleep and nightmares:

*I was tied with a rope in the corner of that room. They [brothel staff] first cut her [Sunita’s friend] hands, legs then the whole floor started to be covered with her blood. After she was killed they asked me to wipe the floor. Later they sent us to our room and locked us in from the outside. We don’t know what they did with her body. The next morning there was no sign of her blood or death. It appeared like nothing had happened that night. I haven’t forgotten that night yet. Frequently, I see her in my dreams and that makes me scream in my sleep.*

(Sunita)

It appears these types of threats were used to keep the women in a constant state of fear and make them comply with the brothel owners’ directives. In response to these threats and the fear of further physical abuse, most women stated that they resigned themselves to sex work because they had no other choice.

Nepalese girls are raised to show modesty and are expected to remain a virgin until marriage (Bennett 1983). When the participants learnt that they were expected to do sex work, they described the revulsion they felt due to the strong social sanctions against sex before marriage in Nepal. Sita recalled how the women were expected to dress in a provocative fashion and were made to drink alcohol. If they refused to comply they faced further punishment:

*We were only allowed to have clothes which would hardly cover half of our body. We had to wear lots of makeup. We were asked to have alcoholic drinks; if we refused those drinks or the customer was not satisfied with us for any reason, we used to be punished.* (Sita)

Similarly, Sila described how her resistance to dressing in this manner resulted in a beating on her first day of work:

*I had reached there at seven in the morning and by evening time they made me dress up. I had never dressed up in such open clothes. I refused to wear the clothes but they started beating me. I thought to myself that it was better to wear those clothes than getting beaten and I wore those clothes.* (Sila)
Several participants mentioned the pain they experienced when they had forced sex for the first time, which resulted in damage to their sex organs. One participant was just nine years old when she had her first sexual experience in the brothel. Others described how they were often forced to have sex when they were sick or physically incapable. Below, Poonam describes the physical complications she experienced as a result of such treatment:

My vagina was stitched 7-8 times; even if the doctor suggested resting for six weeks, they used to send customers within a week and that resulted in a tear of my organ. It happened several times because the ‘gharwalli’ [brothel owner] didn’t allow me to take rest for six weeks. (Poonam)

Many of the women believed that the physical and sexual abuse they experienced resulted in reproductive and other health problems which in turn compromised their ability to carry out physical work, enjoy sexual relations or have children when they returned to Nepal. These ongoing problems are explored in more depth in Chapter Six. However, in terms of the women’s more immediate reactions to their dehumanising treatment, notably some reported contemplating suicide as a way out of brothel life. For example:

I often thought of committing suicide when I was in the brothel but could not because after a woman died, they did not cremate her body ritually. Because of being involved in illegal work, they handed the woman’s body over to the municipality. Sometimes, they would even cut the bodies into pieces and dump them wherever without care. In some cases they threw women’s bodies into the gutter. In Bombay, being a big city, the life of a prostitute is cheap. They clear the gutter the next morning. (Poonam)

For Poonam, her fear of not being able to have a proper burial after her death acted as a disincentive to commit suicide. However, her recollection that she often thought about killing herself while residing in the brothel attests to the extreme conditions she endured. Women trafficked for sex work commonly report reactions such as depression, feelings of hopelessness, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts (Raymond & Hughes 2001; Mitchels 2004; Zimmerman et al. 2006; Baird 2007; Rafferty 2008; Djuranovic 2009; Hossain et al. 2010). Not surprisingly, many women in this study reported similar reactions to those identified in the trafficking literature. Prolonged captivity in the brothel coupled with the recognition that they may never escape further contributed to the women’s sense of hopelessness. Below, Sita recalls her sense of diminished hope as she began to fear that she would never be released and would spend the rest of her life in the brothel:
Once in the brothel, it was uncertain whether we would be released or not. I saw many women who became old working in the brothel, so, I had little hope that I would ever be released from there. (Sita)

Social isolation and loneliness were other commonly reported experiences. Most of the participants reported heightened stress and sadness due to being separated from their family, friends and for some, from their young children. Three of the trafficked women were mothers. One woman had left her children in Nepal with her husband and the other two had been trafficked along with their children. Below, Ambika who was trafficked along with her daughter and son described her fear after she found out that the children of trafficked women were being used for organ harvesting:

When I reached the brothel I came to know that girls with children are also valuable because they accept women with children for their kidneys ... I saw some children over there in a critical condition after having their kidney taken out, and some others were well looked after and being prepared for removal of their kidneys. (Ambika)

In addition, the women reported feeling a lack of control over most aspects of their lives. This sense of powerlessness was exemplified by many women’s expressed fear of contracting HIV from their clients. Although condom use was compulsory in some brothels, the women reported that on occasion clients did not want to use them. As Sunita pointed out, the situation was ‘not in our control’.

Despite being forced into sex work, it is not inconceivable that this ‘work’ may have become a viable occupation for some of the women, particularly those who had a history of abuse from their own families or had experienced extreme poverty and constant hard physical labour. Agustin (2006) claims that some women from poorer countries in Latin America and Asia express a preference for sex work rather than the traditional occupations available to them. In a similar vein, Samarasinghe (2008) argues that it is difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between voluntary prostitution and sex trafficking in Nepal. However, all of the participants in this study indicated that there was no question of accepting sex work as a viable form of employment. Thuli, for example, strongly asserted that she preferred to live with the hardship of village life and work as a labourer rather than doing sex work, which she described as a ‘hell job’:

When I was in the brothel, I longed to be released from that narakkam [hell job]. I was completely aware though of the existing problems in my village and the shortage of food.
But I preferred doing a labouring job in my own village rather than being in that hell and doing that hell job. (Thuli)

Despite the dehumanising conditions the participants endured in the brothels, they reported that this did not have the desired effect of rendering them completely submissive and accepting of their fate. Rather, they remained vigilant and sought opportunities to exercise their agency in whatever way they could. As time went on, some adapted by pretending to be submissive and loyal to their brothel owner, which helped to reduce the extent of their physical abuse. At the same time they retained the hope of escaping from brothel life and returning to Nepal. For example, Maya described how she immediately began searching for an escape route on her first day:

As soon as I reached the brothel and was told about my intended job, I started thinking about how I could escape from the brothel. (Maya)

Similarly, Sila related how she pleaded with a customer to help her flee on her first day of work, only to later realise that he had betrayed her:

At around 8:30 pm there was a Nepali guy who was in the Indian Army who came to me. I asked him ... to help me but instead ... [he] complained about me to the boss lady because I was saying such things. (Sila)

Another participant described being rescued by the Indian police on a number of different occasions, only to find that the brothel owner was able to bribe the police to return her to the brothel:

The police released me from the brothel several times, maybe four or five times. But later I was again sent back to the same place, because our Madam gave money to the Police. (Sunita)

This betrayal of trust, coupled with the frustration and disappointment associated with such experiences diminished but did not extinguish many women’s resolve to escape and their hope of being released or rescued. Despite the tight security system and constant surveillance in the brothels they continued to think about and look for opportunities to escape. By both adapting to their circumstances, yet remaining vigilant regarding opportunities to escape, the data shows that the women were resilient in the face of extremely threatening conditions.
4.3. Exiting the brothel

All the participants eventually exited from the brothels via one of three ways: escape, rescue or release. Eight participants were ultimately able to escape from the brothel on their own, or in some cases with the help of their clients or friends. Nine participants were rescued by the Indian police and three women were released by the brothel owners. Samjana was released due to being frequently sick. Two other women, Kamala and Thuli, were released by their brothel owners after they had finished their specified years of contract, which was negotiated between the brothel owners and the traffickers. Almost half of the women were released within a year, while one woman had to wait ten years.

The search for, and rescue of trafficked women from brothels, is a primary goal of international human rights agencies and anti-trafficking organisations in both India and Nepal (Thomas 2011). Many anti-trafficking organisations assist with brothel raids with a view to rescuing trafficked women and repatriating them to Nepal. Consequently, these organisations have forged connections with Indian social welfare organisations that raid brothels with the assistance of local police. The nine women who were rescued in this way described the police raids as stressful, with some suffering further harm in the process of being rescued. Most of these participants reported that the police raid was unexpected and in these circumstances they were confused as to whether the rescue was ‘real’ or a ‘trick.’ For example, Deepika had been told by the brothel owner not to trust the police and she therefore initially resisted being rescued. She spoke of feeling confused and degraded by police when she was rescued from the brothel:

Most of the rescued girls did not co-operate with the police because our brothel owner had told us that if we were caught by police they will dump us under the ground and we will never get a chance to come out from that place ... When the police came I did not want to go with them. But a woman police officer grabbed me, pulled my hair and took me away from the brothel. (Deepika)

It appears that the Indian police made no attempt to inform the frightened women about what was happening at the time of a rescue raid. Moreover, many of the women reported that they were not provided with the opportunity to collect their belongings, including money and jewellery gifted by their clients. In this regard, some women expressed frustration that they had been forced to work so hard for so many years, but exited the brothel ‘empty handed’. Poonam likened her experience of being rescued from the brothel to being herded out like a farm animal:

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6 In Thuli’s case, she negotiated with the brothel owner to leave the brothel just prior to the expiration of her contract.
Police took us out from the brothel inhumanly; although they were given permission to rescue only the under-aged girls from the brothel, they did not ask our age, they just rescued who they came across. We were treated like farm goats and cattle when being taken out from the brothel ... I also had lots of money and gold in the brothel, but I was not given the opportunity to bring those things at the time of my rescue. (Poonam)

Those women who managed to escape the brothel on their own described the experience as stressful and frightening. Below, Pramila describes how she fled from a sex work ‘assignment’, scantily dressed and without money or other clothing, in the metropolitan heart of Bombay:

After a few years working in the brothel, mostly I was booked for the clients to go with them to hotels. That time I was assigned to a client to stay with him for four days. He usually locked me in when he had to go outside. One time I realised that the door was not locked, so I went outside and escaped. I was wearing only a revealing dress at that time and I had no money and other things with me. (Pramila)

Maya escaped by jumping from a three story building. Although she was severely injured, she described herself as being ‘lucky’ to have avoided death. Below, she describes how her plight was ignored by the people on the street until she pleaded for help and someone took her to the police station:

I crawled away on my hands and knees, but the brothel staff found out that I had jumped from the building and the two sons of the madam followed me. They grabbed me, but I bit them and pushed them away... Many people were watching without saying anything... Nobody showed any sympathy. People were talking in their language but I didn’t understand a single word. Later I heard one voice from the crowd say in Nepalese, ‘Who are you’? I became emotional and cried and asked him to help me go to Nepal. But he took me to the police station. (Maya)

At the police station Maya found out that the police had connections with the brothel owner and that she had been trafficked not just for sex work but also for organ harvesting. Below, she describes how these experiences left her mistrustful of the motives of all the people she came in contact with after escaping the brothel. Her trust was further undermined when the police remanded her in custody:
All the people, no matter whether they were a doctor, a lawyer or the police, appeared to me as ‘dalal’ [pimp] ... they put me in the police lock up for seven days ... I suffered a lot without doing any crime. The brothel owner came to release me from the police and take me back to the brothel. She argued that she had spent a lot of money stating that she had bought me not only for prostitution but also for my kidney ... I was found guilty because I ran away from them. (Maya)

It is important to understand the circumstances surrounding leaving brothel life for two reasons. Firstly, many women experienced the process of rescue as degrading and a form of further abuse, while those who escaped via their own means found the experience frightening and in some instances life threatening. At the same time, the women showed great resilience in being able to survive brothel life. Secondly, the specific circumstances surrounding exiting brothel life was an influential factor in how the women returned to Nepal, which in turn shaped their initial experiences of life back in Nepal. The women who were released by the police or anti-trafficking organisations were routinely referred to support services administered by local NGOs on their repatriation. Consequently, these returnees were entitled to receive support from NGOs. However, the women who escaped or were released had to return to Nepal on their own, or alternatively locate and approach Indian NGOs which assist with the repatriation of trafficked women. The following section discusses the women’s immediate experiences in India after exiting the brothels and their experiences of being repatriated to Nepal.

4.4. The journey home to Nepal

Repatriation is commonly defined as a process of returning to one’s country of origin (Gallagher 2010, p. 338-339). However, in the context of sex trafficked Nepalese women, repatriation is more commonly understood as returning women to their families. In a patriarchal society such as Nepal, this implies that a trafficked woman should be returned to her original ‘owner’, usually her father, husband or brother, with the expectation that the woman will adopt her former primary role of daughter, wife or sister. Takamatsu and Thatun (2004) argue that if formerly trafficked women are to successfully re-establish their lives, repatriation needs to be a voluntary, victim-orientated and informed process. For the women in this study, repatriation was certainly a voluntary process as all of them wanted to leave their brothel and return to Nepal. However, the findings reported in this section suggest that the process was not necessarily victim-orientated and that the women were not adequately informed about what was to happen to them.
The participants in this study returned to Nepal in two main ways: with the assistance of NGOs or via independent means. However, in one case a parent of the participant as well as an NGO were involved. The dominant view of repatriation in the literature is that women are returned to Nepal through NGOs; whereas in this study, eight out of twenty women returned to Nepal independently. It is important to understand the experiences of both groups of women, since they faced different challenges and drew on different sources of support.

Of the eight independent returnees, four went directly to their families in Nepal from India (Mailee, Thuli, Sila and Sarala). The others (Samjana, Kamala, Ambika and Rama) spent from a few days to several months in India before returning to Nepal. The independent returnees described a range of challenges that they faced in returning to Nepal. At a very basic level, some were confronted by the fact that they simply had no idea of their location or routes to Nepal. Others feared being caught by the brothel owner or by the police. Having escaped with no money and speaking little or no Hindi meant that the women were vulnerable to exploitation when attempting to find their way back to Nepal. A few women were sexually abused and had their belongings stolen. Below, Ambika describes how she was raped by a taxi driver and later threatened by a bus driver on the way to Nepal:

> After escaping from the brothel with my daughter, I took a taxi to the hotel where I was initially kept by my traffickers. I had hoped that I may find my son who was left with my traffickers and my friends over there. I didn’t have any money to pay ... so on the way, I was raped by him ... Later, when I caught a bus to Nepal, I was dragged out by the driver who threatened me by saying he would take me to the police. (Ambika)

A further difficulty for many independent returnees was that they had no knowledge of the organisations available to help trafficked women. Rama suggested that if she had known of the existence of those organisations, she might not have suffered as much on her journey home to Nepal:

> In those days, I didn’t have knowledge about the organisations which help women in returning to Nepal; if was aware of such organisations I might not have suffered ... (Rama)

Despite the significant challenges associated with returning to Nepal independently, some independent returnees reported being able to make decisions about how, and when, to return to Nepal that they felt were in their best interests. Mailee, who escaped from the brothel, made a
decision to stay in India for two years to work as a kitchen hand so that she could eventually return to Nepal with some money. Her reasoning for this was that if she took some money to her impoverished family this might mitigate her lost dignity as a woman:

_I didn’t have any money with me when I escaped from the brothel. By this time I had already lost my value, respect and dignity as a woman. On the other hand I was also aware of the poverty of my family back in my village. So, I decided to stay a few more years in India to work and earn money. I found a job as a kitchen helper where I worked for nearly two years. When I returned from India, I was able to bring about 10,000-15,000 rupees._

(Mailee)

Once Mailee decided to return to Nepal, she located a Nepalese man living in India who she thought could provide some protection and guidance for the journey. With her earnings, she was able to pay him to help her to return to her village.

_One of my friends informed me that a Tamang man from near my village was going back there from India. So I made contact with him and gave him money to pay for my transport. In that way I returned home._ (Mailee)

Sarala similarly sought assistance from a Nepalese man to travel with her from India to her village in Nepal. This Tamang man was from Sarala’s village and he had gone to India to collect his sisters’ earnings from work in the brothel. Notably, Sarala had been trafficked by another Tamang man from her village. Despite this potentially risky situation, this man did assist Sarala to reach her village safely:

_After I escaped, I met a Tamang man from the same village as me. At that time, he was in India to meet his sisters. So, in that way, I was assisted by him in coming back to my village in Nepal. Thank God he didn’t play any tricks or sell me to the brothel, unlike the others._

(Sarala)

Thuli, another independent returnee, made a decision to return to Nepal as a married woman. She described how, just prior to the time when her contract at the brothel was due to finish, she met a client from her village who subsequently proposed to her. Thuli knew that because Nepalese cultural norms value youth and beauty in girls, she would find it difficult to find a marriage partner as an older woman. Below, she describes how she weighed up her options and decided that
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ying a younger man who could look after her for life was preferable to potentially finding herself unmarriageable once she left the brothel. She therefore negotiated with the brothel owner to leave the brothel early and returned to her family as a married woman:

*I thought a lot before making a decision to leave the brothel with my husband, such as if I marry this young man in this young age, he will look after me for life and even after I die he will do my death rite ... I also came to an understanding that we girls are valued in the brothel when we are young and beautiful. Therefore I decided to leave the brothel early before I get old to marry and settle down with him. In that way I returned to Nepal.* (Thuli)

The above findings indicate that the journey back to Nepal for some independent returnees was a risky, frightening endeavour which on occasion entailed further abuse. Other independent returnees described how they planned the timing and manner of their return to Nepal in a way which would work in their best interests. Nonetheless, these women’s choices were still very limited. Essentially, all of the independent returnees had to rely on their own resources, networks and ‘good luck’ in returning safely to Nepal. In contrast, the women who returned to Nepal through NGOs had access to more formal sources of support. However, their stories, which are reported below, suggest these women had little control over the repatriation process and faced a range of unique challenges and frustrations.

The rescued women were first accommodated in government shelters in India before being sent to Nepal. Two women claimed that they were treated poorly by staff at these shelters. They described the environment as ‘dirty’. Lack of food was cited as another concern. Sanu described the experience as ‘abusive’ and suggested that there was little difference between life in the shelter and life in the brothel:

*After being rescued from the brothel we were kept inside the Indian government’s shelter for seven months. They treated us very badly...they used very indecent words while talking to us. The only difference between the brothel and that shelter was that we didn’t have to do sex work inside that shelter—but we did suffer lots of abuse.* (Sanu)

The women reported variable waits of weeks, months and in some cases years for their repatriation to Nepal. A few women also went through police investigations and judicial proceedings in India which further prolonged their stay in India. The long wait in the transit home in India was described as frustrating by many women as they were longing to return to Nepal and reunite with their
families. Deepika described how the NGOs involved in the repatriation of trafficked women tend to wait until they have a large group of women to send back to Nepal:

_I was sent to one of the shelters in Bombay where I had to wait for a while in order to return to Nepal because they tend to collect many girls from the different brothels and used to send all in one time._ (Deepika)

A further issue for some women being repatriated through NGOs was the politicisation of the process and the public attention they received. After a series of large rescue operations in Indian brothels in 1996, some NGOs in Nepal commenced repatriating, rehabilitating and reintegrating trafficked girls from India (KC et al. 2001). Five participants in this study were rescued and repatriated in these operations in 1996. These large scale rescues attracted widespread media coverage and public opinion on the repatriation of trafficked women to Nepal was divided. This had a direct impact on the women themselves. For example, Sanu described how she was perceived as a ‘spoilt’ woman who was a threat to the entire nation:

_The girls from other countries were repatriated immediately after their rescue. They went back within three months. But for us, we waited so long because at that time our government raised three issues, mainly to stop our repatriation. Firstly, they asked us to show any evidence of us being Nepali, but we didn’t have any documents of being Nepalese citizens. Secondly, was that our identity was perceived the same way as the AIDS virus. Our Government and people had the fear that if they allow us, we would become the primary cause of spreading AIDS into the community and in the country as a whole. Thirdly, they perceived us as spoilt women and suspected that our communities would be badly affected by our return._ (Sanu)

As a result of this negative public attention, some participants confided that they felt hurt and humiliated by the reception they received when they arrived in Nepal. Poonam, for example, described how she started to question her decision to return to Nepal after arriving at the airport:

_As soon as we arrived at our airport [Kathmandu airport], we were surrounded by media people, journalists and their cameras. A huge number of people were also there to see us. Later I found out that in Nepal, it was greatly publicised that many girls were coming back from the brothel of Mumbai. They asked us many embarrassing questions instantly outside_
the airport. That moment was quite frustrating. At that moment, I regretted my decision to come back to Nepal. I asked myself—Why did I come back? (Poonam)

Overall, the women’s accounts of returning to Nepal suggest that, in the main, the repatriation process was not victim orientated or sensitive to their needs. Furthermore, some women were subjected to further abuse. Nonetheless, despite the challenges and dangers experienced by many of the women during their repatriation to Nepal, they were still excited to be going home. Below, Sila describes the patriotic emotion she felt when nearing the India-Nepal border where she was to catch the ‘Nepal bound’ bus:

At six in the morning, we reached Silgudi [Nepal- India border]. In Silgudi, there were bus drivers shouting “Nepal-bound, Nepal-bound.” As soon as I heard that word, I felt so immensely happy that my eyes filled with tears. I told them to stop the taxi and told them proudly that I was also going to Nepal! (Sila)

4.5. Arrival in Nepal

The women who were repatriated to Nepal via anti-trafficking organisations continued to receive assistance from these NGOs after they arrived in Nepal. As mentioned in the literature review, anti-trafficking organisations provide care, support and rehabilitation for trafficking survivors, with a view to reintegrating them back into their community. In contrast, the eight independent returnees had to manage their initial arrival in Nepal by themselves. The next section examines the experiences of the women who were assisted by NGOs after they arrived in Nepal. This is followed by a discussion on how the independent returnees managed their initial return.

4.5.1. Women’s experiences of anti-trafficking NGOs

The twelve women who were brought back to Nepal by anti-trafficking NGOs were transferred to rehabilitation centres after their arrival. The women stayed at these centres for variable periods of time, ranging from a few days to months. At the time of interview, one woman was residing in a rehabilitation centre indefinitely. This participant’s parents had died and she felt unable to contact her husband after returning to Nepal.

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7Anti-trafficking organisations in Nepal operate several rehabilitation centres for formerly trafficked women which provide shelter, vocational training and medical care to returnee women. In this study, these organisations are referred to as anti-trafficking organisations or NGOs. Alternatively, they are referred to as rehabilitation centres or shelter homes when this is the focus of discussion.
Some returnees voiced their appreciation of the assistance provided to them by the NGOs on their arrival. For example, Sanu, one of the returnees from the highly politicised 1996 rescue, commented that this particular group of women would not have been able to return home without the assistance of the anti-trafficking NGOs:

*I believe that we [previously trafficked women] were able to return to Nepal only because of the effort and initiation of some anti-trafficking NGOs in Nepal, because at that time the Government of Nepal was not open about repatriating us.* (Sanu)

However, other women related negative accounts of their time in the rehabilitation centres which revolved around their lack of autonomy. Many of the returnees had anticipated that after arriving in Nepal they would enjoy the freedoms which they had been deprived of while living in the brothels. However, the returnees reported that they had little control over their day to day lives in the rehabilitation centres. Below, Smiriti vents her frustration at being confined to the NGO’s premises during her stay:

*They [the staff of the NGO] did not allow me to go outside the boundary of the building. I could not even call my parents on my own ... I was so frustrated living over there because we couldn’t leave that organisation of our own wish ... we were kept inside.* (Smiriti)

Some participants believed that they were treated with a fundamental lack of respect by the NGO workers. For example, Poonam described how the women were not even offered the basic courtesy of a chair to sit on when they were called to the workers’ office:

*We were not even offered a chair in their office. We were frequently called into the office. But despite having several empty chairs in their office, we all were forced to wait sometimes for the staff—or sometimes we had to stand throughout the conversation. Usually those conversations used to be so long.* (Poonam)

HIV testing appeared to be one of the mandatory requirements of the NGOs and all twelve women underwent testing. Four women were diagnosed as HIV positive. Poonam was one of these women. Notably, her HIV status was not kept confidential and she felt that she was treated like an ‘untouchable’ by some of the workers. Poonam viewed this as discrimination, but she was powerless to do anything about it while residing in the NGO:
Not all the staff in that organisation had a good knowledge of HIV. I was seriously discriminated against by some staff. They hesitated to touch me, so they usually threw things such as keys in my hand instead of giving them to me nicely. (Poonam)

Testing for HIV without an individual’s informed consent on public health grounds or for any other purpose is considered unethical and a violation of human rights (UNHCR, WHO & UNAIDS 2009). It is similarly not in accord with the rights-based rhetoric espoused by many of the anti-trafficking organisations (Locke 2010). A further concern was that Poonam had a follow up test two years later which revealed that she was not HIV positive. She was later informed by the NGO that she had been given the wrong report after her initial test. While Poonam was relieved to hear that she was not HIV positive, the incident attests to the lack of care taken by staff in overseeing the testing process.

Some women were asked to file a case against their traffickers on their immediate arrival in Nepal. Although they wanted to see their traffickers punished, dealing with legal procedures proved to be quite frustrating and time consuming. The women who had filed a case against their traffickers with the help of NGOs were not allowed to leave the organisations until their cases were finalised. As a result, these women experienced delays in returning home.

Other participants described being pressured to take legal action without adequate time to consider the implications of doing so. In Deepika’s case, she learnt from the NGO staff that her husband had been involved in her trafficking. Despite being deeply shocked by this news, she had still contemplated reuniting with her husband for the sake of her son. Deepika was urged by staff to testify against her husband but now questions whether she made the right decision, especially since she has sole responsibility for bringing up her son while her husband is in prison:

At first, I didn’t believe my husband was involved in my trafficking because he used to love me so much and I have a son from him. Later, Madam [lawyer of the organisation] read out the statement of my husband. There he had declared his involvement in my trafficking case. Sometimes, I think that I was wrong and due to my immaturity he is now behind bars without doing any crime and so is away from me and my little son. (Deepika)

All of the women had to undertake skills training while living in the NGOs. These classes typically focused on traditional women’s skills such as sewing, candle making and jewellery making. One of the women questioned the value of attending these classes, describing them as boring:
Actually, I felt very bored participating in necklace-making training on an everyday basis. (Smiriti)

Several authors are critical of the traditional skills training provided by anti-trafficking organisations because it is not likely to enable formerly trafficked women to forge an independent livelihood (Joshi 2001; Poudel, Richardson & Laurie 2009; Locke 2010). Of further concern is the compulsory nature of this training, which Smiriti indicated the women had to attend every day. In this regard, it suggests that the women had little control over how they spent their time while residing in the rehabilitation centres.

In sum, the participants’ accounts of life in the rehabilitation centres are consistent with previous research that suggests many Nepalese NGOs tend to adopt a paternalistic approach to working with formerly trafficked women (Frederick 2005; Bashford 2006; Locke 2010). The women’s lack of privacy and limited autonomy were nominated as primary concerns. The returnees perceived that many of their choices were governed by the NGOs and experienced limited freedom of movement while residing in the rehabilitation centres. It is recognised that when anti-trafficking organisations do not allow returnees to exercise their autonomy or force services onto them, this can exacerbate the women’s existing trauma and prolong their victimisation (UN News Centre 2013). In this regard, the findings from this study add weight to the above authors’ arguments that the role of NGOs in rehabilitating formerly trafficked women needs to be viewed in a more critical light.

4.5.2. The independent returnees’ experiences of arrival in Nepal

The discussion in this section focuses on the experiences of the four women who returned to Nepal independently and spent time in Kathmandu before returning to their villages. The women’s reasons for spending time in Kathmandu before returning to their respective villages were varied. Rama wanted to take legal action against her traffickers. Ambika’s primary motive was to find her husband. Kamala went to live with her sister until such time as she felt more confident to return home. Samjana similarly delayed her return, planning to go back to her village at festival time with gifts for her family.

Notably, none of the participants indicated that they had made use of these skills to gain employment or generate an income after returning to Nepal. This theme is taken up further in Chapter Six, which focuses on the longer term outcomes for the women.

Four of the eight independent returnees (Mailee, Thuli, Sila and Sarala) went directly to their families in Nepal from India. Their initial experiences of returning to their villages are discussed in Chapter Five.
Rama was a single woman who worked in a carpet factory in Kathmandu prior to her trafficking. She was able to escape from the brothel after a few months. Rama remained extremely angry with her traffickers and wanted to see them punished, so she went to Kathmandu to initiate legal action against her traffickers before returning to her village:

* I had arrived at the Kathmandu bus park in the early morning. Then, straightaway I went to Gausala Police Station and told the police that I was trafficked to India and had just arrived there. After that I went to my previous rented room together with the police in their van. There we found that guy, his brother and that ‘newarni didi’ [all her traffickers]. They were all having their morning meal. The police arrested them on the spot. (Rama)

However, Rama later found out that her trust in the police had been misplaced. One of the officers involved in the arrest took advantage of her and sexually assaulted her. As a result she became pregnant:

* One police assured of helping me from my situation on my return to Nepal, but he took advantage of my situation and made me pregnant with my son and ran away, adding more complications. (Rama)

Rama was subsequently locked up by the police for three weeks. She made a complaint against the police but nothing happened. After she was released from jail she returned to her family’s village with the added anxiety of her pregnancy.

Ambika was a married woman with two children who had lived in Kathmandu prior to her trafficking. On returning to Nepal she first went to the rented room she had lived in with her husband in Kathmandu. She had planned to keep her sex trafficking incident secret from her husband and had anticipated being able to resume her life with him. However, she discovered that her husband had vacated the room and was living with another woman. Ambika’s landlord demanded that she pay several months of rent arrears, which caused her great anxiety because she had no money:

* At that time I was in debt; the room rent hadn’t been paid for a month; I didn’t have any money so I was worried about ... where to get money to buy food for my children. (Ambika)
During this time Ambika struggled to feed her family. She sold her jewellery to pay for the rent arrears and eventually found work washing clothes. However, she and the children continued to live a hand-to-mouth existence in Kathmandu:

*We survived eating ‘cheura’ (rice flakes) and a sugar mix for a few days because it was cheap and did not require fuel to cook. After a few days I got a job washing clothes in a well-off family where I was given their leftover cooked food. But I did not eat that food ... I saved it for my children ... That was the way we survived for a year.* (Ambika)

Ambika eventually located her husband with the help of the police. He returned to live with the family for another year before abandoning them. From that time onwards Ambika had to fend for herself and her children.

Kamala had left home without informing her parents, so after she was released from the brothel she started to worry about returning to her family. She decided to spend some time in Kathmandu with her sister first before returning home.10

*Initially, I had fled with my traffickers, leaving my family uninformed. So, I did not have the courage to face my family by myself. Therefore, I first went to my sister’s place at Gaurighat, Kathmandu because she had some idea about my fleeing. Then I was taken home by my sister.* (Kamala)

Finally, it appears Samjana spent a few days in Kathmandu before returning home to her village at festival time. Prior to leaving India, Samjana had become ill and she arrived back in Nepal in poor health. On the way back to Nepal she had her jewellery stolen. She spent what little money she had buying some gifts to take home for her family.

*I was not able to bring much money didi [Sister Jyoti] as I became sick, I was not able to work much and this was the reason why I was sent home ... anyway I spent a few days in Kathmandu on the way home. In Kathmandu, I brought this watch from a street based stall in Rs150. I purchased some clothes for my mother, nieces and nephews ...* (Samjana)

The independent returnees who first stopped at Kathmandu had no or limited money on their arrival and thus were vulnerable to exploitation. As shown, one struggled to survive with her two small

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10A more detailed account of Kamala’s story is presented in a case study in Chapter Seven.
children and another was raped by a person whose job it was to protect her. The two women who had either a little money or some family support were able to strategise about how they might return to their villages. Kamala planned not to face her family alone, and therefore first went to her sister’s place in Kathmandu before returning to her village accompanied by her sister. Samjana, despite being sick and having limited money, decided it would be advantageous to return to her poor family during festival time with some gifts. Unlike the women who were repatriated with the assistance of NGOs, the independent returnees exercised more autonomy and made decisions that they believed were in their best interests based on knowledge of their particular circumstances. However, as women travelling alone in Nepal, they were at heightened risk of abuse and had little recourse to protection.

4.5.3. Anticipating returning home to family

Most of the women were excited about the prospect of returning home and seeing their families after a long separation. However, they were also apprehensive about how they would be received by their families and local community. In particular, they were worried that they would no longer be considered as worthy of returning to their families after being to ‘ijjet falne thau’ [a shameful place]. Fitting in with others and being part of a community is highly valued by Nepalese people (Colom & Pradhan 2013). The women were well aware that community knowledge of their trafficking would likely be a barrier to their acceptance.

Chameli, who had spent ten years in a brothel followed by two years in an Indian NGO, described her anxiety regarding returning to her family. This anxiety was generated by her fear of rejection:

I was worried about the possible reaction of my family. At that time I was wondering if my brothers would accept me back into the family, how they would react? I was wondering if they would allow me to stay with them. (Chameli)

Others similarly echoed feeling unworthy of being accepted back into their families:

I was ashamed; actually, I had no courage to show my face to my family and villagers. (Kamala)

I thought as if I had no right to go back home. (Smiriti)

I thought as if I was going to add an extra burden to my family. (Sushila)
Sila’s anxiety about returning home came from a different source. She was trafficked to India with her cousin, but they were separated after their traffickers sold them to different brothels. Sila escaped from the brothel and returned to Nepal, but she felt she would be held responsible for her cousin’s disappearance and was fearful of returning home without her:

*The bus which I took from the border would have taken me directly to my home in Udaypur, but I did not purchase that ticket because I had fear in me as I had left my cousin back there [in Calcutta] and my sister and brother-in-law would kill me if they found out as we had left together ... I was so disturbed thinking whether to go home or not and what they will ask.*

(Sila)

All of the participants perceived themselves as different women after exiting brothel life. Some women related this difference back to their increasing age and poor health. Several women reported that as a result of being forced to drink alcohol in the brothel they had become alcoholics. Sita described herself as being an ‘unusual pale white’ at the time of her release. She said that she had not seen sunlight during the three years she had spent in the brothel. Maya described herself as having a ‘bald head’ and ‘deformed eyes’ due to the electric shock she received in the brothel and the injury she sustained while making her escape. The women worried about how their families would react to these physical changes, as well as the impact their poor health might have on their ability to resume domestic labour.

Other participants described cultural and linguistic changes that were reflected in their speech patterns. For example, some women found they could no longer easily speak their mother tongue. As a result of living in India, many of the women had adopted Hindi words and expressions in their day to day communication. Given that speech is a salient aspect of identity, this also made the women’s difference more visible to others. Consequently, the women’s excitement about returning home was tinged with apprehension about how these differences would be perceived.

Several women described feeling anxious about returning home without money or gifts for their families, which is not in accord with social expectations in Nepal. Below, Sarala recalls her anxiety about returning home ‘empty-handed’:

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11This was also evident during the interview process, when some of the women interspersed their speech with Hindi terms and expressions.
I met a man from my village in India after I escaped from the brothel. That man stayed in India for a month to be with his sisters who worked in the brothel. On returning home, he had brought so many things from India with the earning of his sisters. He had even hired a porter to carry that stuff, but I had nothing to carry with me. I came back home as I left home: empty handed. (Sarala)

Women who were married at the time of their trafficking faced additional challenges. These women were aware that it would not be feasible for them to return to their husbands because of their prior history of sex work. Sunita anticipated that her husband would have remarried and started a new family:

It had been so long since I had seen him or heard from him. I thought that he might have married again; he may have a new family with his new wife. So, I didn’t like to interrupt his new life by letting him know that I was back. (Sunita)

The women who were married at the time of trafficking or who became pregnant outside of marriage initially hesitated in returning to their parents’ home. In Nepal, rights to parental property are available only to sons and unmarried daughters (Steinzor 2003). These women perceived that they had no formal right to return to their parents’ home. Moreover, the returnees who were trafficked by family members or community members were fearful of how their traffickers would react to them once they arrived home. Maya, for example, had been sold by her brother and sister-in-law and thought that it would not be possible for her to return home:

I knew that going back to my parents’ home and making a living with them would not be possible for me because my culture doesn’t allow an already married girl to stay in their parents’ home. The other thing was I was sold by my own brother and sister-in-law. So, I knew that they would not cooperate on my returning home. I could not even afford renting a small room because I was uneducated. (Maya)

Thus, each woman’s sense of apprehension about returning home was fuelled by a complex interplay of factors including individual trafficking circumstances, time spent away from home, marital status, physical health, financial circumstances, community attitudes and family expectations. Notably, some of the women even questioned if they had the right to go home and started to contemplate other options.
4.6. Chapter summary and conclusion

This chapter provides an understanding of the participants’ lives in the brothel, their exit and repatriation, and immediate living circumstances prior to going home to their families. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, all these experiences appeared to have longer term consequences for them in terms of the extent to which they could reintegrate into family and village life.

All the women were subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment and punishment while living in the brothels. Living in a foreign country and having limited knowledge of the local language were nominated as additional stressors. Being held in captivity, separated from family and friends, routinely abused, and forced to do sex work which deeply offended their values, was extremely distressing for all the participants. These aspects of trafficking are rightly viewed as violations of human rights (UN OHCHR 2010; Wheaton, Schauer & Galli 2010). However, the women also described further violations of their rights during their repatriation to Nepal. Leaving their respective brothels ‘empty handed’ and in poor physical health were added complications for some of the women after returning to Nepal.

The women’s stories show that once they exited the brothel, their ordeal continued in the form of further abuses and humiliation. The experiences of those women who sought assistance and shelter from anti-trafficking agencies, suggest that these agencies used their position of power to exercise a high level of control over their lives. Some experienced the NGOs as unfriendly environments where they were often humiliated by the staff. Many women experienced NGO rehabilitation centres as another form of confinement where they had to submit to various seemingly mandatory procedures. The assistance provided to them was not necessarily driven by their needs and interests, but appeared to be imposed on them in line with the NGO’s policies and procedures. These practices, such as restricting freedom of movement, can be seen as additional human rights violations which contributed to negative outcomes for some of the returnees.

The experiences of the independent returnees suggest further hardships and assaults. Two women were raped; others took significant risks to find a safe passage to Nepal. Two of these women had the added responsibility of caring for their small children. In contrast to the women repatriated by NGOs, the independent returnees were able to exercise some autonomy in planning how and when they would return to their families. However, as women travelling alone in India and Nepal, they were equally vulnerable to predatory behaviour.
The fact that the women were able to survive and return to Nepal is testament to their resilience. Once back in Nepal, the women were excited about the prospect of seeing their families again but also fearful that they might not be accepted. Nonetheless, a strong desire to see their family and friends prevailed. The next chapter explores the women’s experiences of returning to their family and villages.
5. Chapter Five: Returning home: Initial responses of family and community

5.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the participants’ experiences of returning to their family home and their attempts to integrate into village life. It focuses on the accounts of the eighteen women who returned to their family home with the intention of staying in their village. It is important to note that two participants did not return to their villages. Sunita was married at the time of being trafficked. She spent three years in an Indian brothel and after returning to Nepal presumed that her husband would have remarried. Sunita’s parents were dead so she decided to stay in an NGO in Kathmandu rather than return to her husband’s home. Sita, whose father died when she was very young, was trafficked when she was nine years old. After returning to Nepal she stayed in an NGO in Kathmandu for approximately ten years because the NGO was unable to locate her family. When she eventually returned to her village she learnt that her mother had died. Sita stayed just few days in her uncle’s house and then returned to live in the NGO in Kathmandu. These two participants’ accounts of living in Kathmandu are reported in the next chapter.

While all eighteen women were reunited with their families, the length of time they stayed in their respective villages varied. Seven women recalled staying with their families for only three or four weeks. Another five women reported staying with their families for a period of one to twelve months, and two stayed for three years. At the time of interview, four women had been residing in their villages for eight to fifteen years, and one had just returned to her village a month before. Notably, all but five women eventually left their families.

This chapter first canvasses the initial reactions the women received from their parents, family and community on returning home. Next, it examines the women’s attempts to integrate into community life, including the difficulties they experienced in returning to traditional village work, the survival strategies they used to adapt to village life, and their reasons for eventually leaving their communities. It then explores the reasons why the thirteen women eventually left their villages to live independently in Kathmandu or to live in NGOs. 12

Before presenting the women’s experiences of returning to their families, it is first necessary to clarify the concept of ‘home’ in the Nepalese context. In Nepal, the literal meaning of home for women is commonly determined by their marital status. For a married woman, ‘home’ is her husband’s home and for an unmarried woman, ‘home’ is considered to be her parents’ home. As indicated in Chapter Four, the women in this study who were married at the time of being trafficked

12The experiences of those women who stayed longer term in their villages are explored in Chapter Six.
believed that it was not possible for them to return to their husband’s home. Consequently, these women returned to their ‘maiti’ [parents’ home/parents] after returning to Nepal as they felt they had no other choices about where they could live. At the same time they reported feeling somewhat humiliated in having to return to their parents’ home, which may reflect the view that married daughters in Nepal are generally considered as guests or visitors in their family of origin (Joshi 2001).

5.2. Women’s initial experience of returning to their family home

The participants in this study were away from their families for varying periods of time ranging from one month to twenty years. Most participants reported that their families had no understanding of the reasons for their sudden disappearance, although some had speculated that they had met with an accidental death or eloped. After a period of time, some families did receive information about the circumstances of their daughter’s disappearance. In a few cases families found out that their daughters had been trafficked to India after making inquiries through their networks. Others only learnt about their daughter’s trafficking after they were contacted by NGOs once their daughter had returned to Nepal. In one case the family learned about their daughter’s trafficking and return to Nepal after the publication of this news in a local newspaper.

The way in which each family had made sense of their daughter’s disappearance appears to be one of the factors which influenced their reactions when reunited with their daughters.

The following section outlines family and community responses to the women’s return in terms of three key themes which emerged from the data:

- Parents’ reactions: positive, mixed and hostile
- Adverse reactions from extended family members
- Negative community responses

5.2.1. Parents’ reactions: positive, mixed and hostile

When initially reunited with their families, most women received a largely positive reception from their parents. In a few cases, parents expressed mixed emotions regarding their daughter’s return and for three participants, their parents were quite hostile. Sarala describes how her family was happy to see her, especially as they had assumed that when she disappeared, she had died accidentally and they would never see her again:
One of my friends and I had been to the forest to cut and collect grass for the cattle. We were taken to India from that forest. After my return, I heard from my parents that they had searched for me for several days. They later assumed that I might have fallen off the hill and died. Therefore my family were happy to see me alive. (Sarala)

Mailee, whose family had no idea about why she had disappeared, said that her parents became very emotional on her return home. Mailee described how her parents wept when they were reunited and naturally were anxious to understand what had happened to her:

They [parents] asked me ‘Where have you been for so many years? What happened to you and how did it happen?’ They started crying upon seeing me. I can understand why my parents cried at the time seeing their lost daughter after so many years. (Mailee)

A few women reported that their parents expressed their joy as well as gratitude to God for enabling their daughters’ release from the brothel and return home. Some parents also encouraged the women to start a new life. For example, Deepika recalled how her parents urged her to look to the future on returning home:

Je bhagyama hunuthiyo bhayo, aba tyo birser aaagi badnu parcha [what was fated is now over, so you need to forget your bad past and move forward]. (Deepika)

Similarly, Chameli, whose family learnt from an NGO that she was alive and had been trafficked to India said that her family perceived her returning home after twelve years as a miracle and an opportunity for ‘rebirth’ or a new life:

As soon as I met with my family they started crying. Then my uncle said ‘She is our daughter who has just been given a chance to start a new life, so we all need to treat her well’. (Chameli)

Samjana, whose parents were poor and had learned after some time that that she had been trafficked to India, described how her return was a joyous occasion for her family, especially as this coincided with festival time. She recalled that on her return her mother expressed her anger and sadness at the way in which she had been treated by the brothel owner who sent her home after she became sick. In addition, she was not given any money when she was released from the brothel and therefore she returned home with nothing:
My mother was happy to see me back, but she cried after she found out I was sick and so was sent home from the brothel. It was the time of Dashian [festival] when I had returned. So my whole family got tears instead of meat [a token of festivity] during the festival. My mother therefore cursed the brothel owner for sending me home in a critically sick condition and with no money. (Samjana)

Rama explained that her parents’ illiteracy and remote location resulted in them having limited awareness of sex trafficking. This in turn worked in her favour as initially they were not aware that she had been involved in sex work:

*My parents are illiterate and live on a remote hill so they do not know much about why women are taken to India and in particular, about the nature of the work that we were forced to do over there.* (Rama)

Sushila had been residing in an NGO prior to returning home and the details of her trafficking were published in a local newspaper. Notably, the US Department of State’s guidelines on media best practices (2014) states that the details of trafficking cases should not be published without the victim’s consent as this can lead to re-victimisation. However, in Sushila’s case, she was not consulted about the publication of her story and this unwanted publicity meant that she had no control over what information to share with her family. As a result, some of Sushila’s extended family members threatened to shun her parents if they allowed her to return home. Yet, despite these threats, they asked her to come back home:

*On my return to Nepal I was informed that the story of my trafficking was published in a local newspaper. Before my arrival, my parents and relatives knew all about my trafficking. My uncles had threatened my parents saying that if they allowed me to enter the house they would not take any food and drinks in our house (bhat pani bahek garchau) [a form of social rejection]. My parents were old and had asthma and my mother could not see properly. Even though they were in such poor health and despite the threat they received from my uncles, they asked me to come home from the NGO.* (Sushila)

As noted in Chapter Four, Thuli had made a strategic decision to marry one of her clients when her work contract in the brothel was coming to an end. This decision appeared to be an important factor in reducing the potential for rejection from her family and community. Being a married woman and having a supportive husband helped her gain a degree of social acceptance:
I returned to the village with my husband and no one said anything bad to me. So, in my experience if we have supportive husbands who love us, the other people become hesitant to demean us. (Thuli)

Nayanshi, who was thirteen years old at the time of her trafficking, received a mixed response from her parents. She described how her father searched for her after she disappeared and worked with a Nepalese NGO to rescue and bring her back to Nepal. However, despite his obvious concern, he implied that she was responsible for her own trafficking, assuming that her education and employment in a temple should have been protective factors:

My father blamed me. He said ‘you were involved in temple work and were educated. How could this have happened to you?’ (Nayanshi)

In Poonam’s case, her father welcomed her back into the family but her stepmother was less receptive to her return:

My father and even my uncles were happy to see me back. They were encouraging me, saying ‘You got an opportunity to see the outside world at a young age. Now you are grown up and can lead your life the way you would like it to go’ ... The only person in my family who was not supportive on my return was my stepmother. (Poonam)

Poonam reported being mistreated by her stepmother prior to being trafficked. After returning to Nepal with the assistance of an NGO she informed the staff that she did not wish to return to her family. However, the NGO staff indicated that they did not have the funds to support her long term and convinced her to return home. Anticipating a hostile reaction from her stepmother, she requested the staff not to tell her family about her trafficking situation. Nonetheless, Poonam’s wishes were ignored:

The staff of that organisation left me in my home even though they were fully informed that the environment of my home was not at all favourable for me. I also had requested them to not disclose my trafficking to anyone in the family except to my father. But at the time we reached home, my father was not there. The staff were in a rush to find my family and to hand over the responsibility of me to them, so they didn’t even wait for my father to come. They told the entire story of my trafficking to my stepmother and left me there ... I continued to suffer much more from my stepmother after they left me at home. (Poonam)
In Poonam’s situation, the NGO staff seemed more concerned with the administrative task of handing her back to her parents than acting in her best interests. This failure to respect her wishes resulted in an adverse outcome for her, where she continued to be treated badly by her stepmother.

Three women reported receiving a hostile reception from their families. Sanu and Sila’s experiences are reported below, while Smiriti’s experiences are discussed in detail as a case study in Chapter Seven. After three years, Sanu’s family learned from an NGO that she had been trafficked to India. Upon returning home, the family’s reaction was to treat her as an ‘untouchable’. They held her responsible for her own trafficking and also made it clear that they now perceived her to be a woman of no character:

*My family and community perceived my trafficking incident as a crime which I did knowingly. They knew that I worked in the brothel which means that I had sex with many people. They told me: ‘You are a spoilt woman (Bigreko keti) and a characterless woman’. They also treated me as an untouchable.* (Sanu)

Sanu further reflected on women’s low status in Nepal, and how being sex trafficked further devalues their status:

*Giving birth to a daughter itself is considered as one of the curses and burdens for the family in our place. More than that, we are returnee women from sex work; so you too can estimate how we are considered of no value after returning to our family.* (Sanu)

Sila reported having a widowed mother who was financially dependent on Sila’s brother and his wife. In this context, her mother was powerless to influence decision making about whether Sila would be allowed to remain in the family home. Sila’s sister-in-law accused her of knowingly adding social and economic burden to her family and implied that she should have chosen to remain in the brothel:

*My sister-in-law reacted rudely on my arrival and my heart still feels this pain. She said I should not have returned; rather it would have been better if I had rotted back there [in the brothel in Calcutta]. She repeatedly asked why I had returned home to add a burden to her family.* (Sila)
In Nepalese culture, the strict moral code surrounding sex outside marriage means that families often feel pressured to reject daughters and wives who have been involved with prostitution as they are seen as a threat to the existing moral order (Poudel 2009). This was certainly the case for Sila, Sanu and Smiriti. Outright condemnation and hostility from their families made it extremely difficult for them to integrate back into family and village life. In addition, these participants had no other options for accommodation and they left their respective villages after a few weeks. Notably, however, most parents initially welcomed their daughters back into the family home and were pleased to see them. For others, it appeared that economic considerations, pre-existing family conflicts and unwanted media attention shaped their family’s mixed reactions to their return. The next section expands on the reception the women received after returning home by exploring the reactions of extended family members.

5.2.2. Adverse reactions from extended family members

The majority of responses from extended family members were not at all supportive. Many women reported that after their return they were shunned by some family members. For example, Maya recalled that although she was allowed to remain in her home by her parents she was ignored by other family members:

[Before being trafficked] I was much loved by my brothers, parents and husband. But on my return I was left by my husband and my brothers did not talk to me ... I used to be close to my sisters-in-law, with whom I used to share my sorrows and happiness ... But now they are changed; since I had no reputation, they ignored me, they liked to keep a distance from me ... They didn’t talk and show any interest in me which hurt me ... after that I got a feeling like it would had been better if I had stayed in India rather than coming back to Nepal.  
(Maya)

Although Sushila was received positively by her parents and her brother, other family members objected to her staying in the family. This created tension between her brother and his wife, and eventually their marriage broke up:

My middle brother stood up for me against my other family members and supported my return. But it is sad to say that later, his wife left him due to providing too much attention to me and supporting my returning home. (Sushila)
Similarly, Ambika described how she now has no contact with her siblings after they objected to her parents allowing her to stay in the family home, resulting in a longstanding family divide:

*I still do not have good relationships with my sisters. We do not see each other because they were against my returning home. They too are angry with my parents because of accepting me back in to their family.* (Ambika)

Deepika had been trafficked by her husband and initiated legal action against him after returning to Nepal. Her return provoked a hostile reaction from her husband’s family, who subsequently became abusive towards both her and her family:

*My husband’s family house is just next to my parents’ village. They, along with the villagers, do not believe that I was sold by my husband. They are very angry with me and my parents because I filed a legal case against him [her husband] and so now he is in prison. Therefore, they always fought with me and my family.* (Deepika)

In contrast to the largely positive responses the women received from their parents when they returned home, it appeared that they faced greater negativity from extended family members, which in some cases promoted family conflict. At this stage, some women reported becoming more aware that their ongoing life in their family and community would not be easy for them or for their parents. The following section explores the returnee women’s experiences after they commenced living with their families in their respective communities. Notably, negative community attitudes to sex trafficked women appeared as one of the determining factors affecting the participants’ ability to reside longer term with their families in their villages.

5.2.3. Community members’ reactions to returnee women

In the rural villages of Nepal, family units form part of a dense network of social relationships (Robins 2011). Due to these close-knit networks, community perceptions and treatment of trafficked women play a significant role in shaping returnee women’s lives. In this study, almost all participants reported receiving hostile responses from community members after returning home. It was commonplace for them to be subject to harassment and discrimination. Community hostility led to one returnee being rejected by her family, while in another case a returnee’s entire family were forced to leave their village. The negative community attitudes displayed towards the returnees was also extended to family members, as described by Sarala below:
My nearest and dearest didn’t say many things, but the other people disliked my return, and hesitated to accept me. They even acted badly to my parents for showing their affection to me and allowing me to enter the house. (Sarala)

Rama recalled how, despite trying to keep her trafficking a secret, it became public knowledge in her village. This in turn resulted in the villagers casting her in the same light as a sex worker:

To date I haven’t told anyone in my village that I was trafficked to India but they are very clever. They know everything ... they humiliated me saying that you had been to such a place (brothel), so you are a prostitute. (Rama)

Nayanshi, whose father helped to rescue her from the brothel, described how she was demeaned and ostracised by her friends and neighbours, and how they also pressured her parents to evict her from the family home:

As I was away from my home and community for so many days, the villagers gossiped on my return ... they said I had a bad character. The family of my friends told my friends not to accompany me, talk or walk with me. They thought that even to talk with me would impact on their image. Therefore, on my return I felt like my friends became friends no more. Later, the community put serious pressure on my parents to caste me out from the community. (Nayanshi)

In Sanu’s case, community members encouraged her parents to reject her soon after her arrival and actually threatened the family with expulsion from the community if they did not tell her to leave the village. While Sanu’s family were hostile towards her, she felt that she could have withstood their hostility and worked to improve their relationship over time while living with them. However, she could not cope with both family and community anger:

Actually in my situation I was rejected more by the society than my family ... The entire community was already informed about my trafficking. They had some kind of belief that they should not allow returnee girls to live in their village. They threatened my family that if they allowed me to live with them, they would be rejected by the community. At that time, my family was not in a position to challenge the entire community, so in that way my family was forced by the community to reject me. (Sanu)
Many returnee women said that they were ridiculed by community members if they were seen out in a public place and, as a result, were unable to freely access community facilities in daylight hours. This resulted in further social isolation. For example, Poonam described how she was forced to stay indoors during the day to reduce her social visibility:

*My parents lived in sukambasi basti*, which was very crowded. When I was outside my house, people pointed to me and used very bad words when talking about me. It was very difficult for me even to go to the toilet as it was outside our house. In our place there was only one public tap for water. I couldn’t even go to bring water for the household, or have a shower, since many people usually gather around that tap. Later on I stopped appearing outside my house in the day time. (Poonam)

Nepalese social norms regarding purity appeared to influence the way many community members viewed the returnees as being impure. Some participants commented that they were treated like lower caste people or ‘untouchables’. In Nepal lower caste people are often denied entry into the houses of higher castes and commonly denied access to public facilities (Shrestha 2002; Bhattachan, Sunar & Bhattachan 2009). Below, Maya likens the treatment she received from local villagers to the discriminatory practices that lower caste people are subject to in her community:

*The people in my village treated me exactly the same way as our grandparents used to treat people from kami and damai castes (lower castes) ... People used to put the water jug on the floor instead of handing it to the low caste people ... One day I was sent to cultivate millet on my neighbour’s farm. I became thirsty, so I asked for a glass of cold water in the house of one of our neighbours. A little boy brought a glass of water for me from his kitchen but his mother suddenly came and snatched the glass from his hand, and started questioning him, saying ‘What are you doing?’ Then she brought me water in a different jug and put it on the floor instead of giving it in my hand. She asked me to wash the jug well and leave it to dry in the sun.* (Maya)

This incident is revealing in that it demonstrates how, as a returnee, Maya was regarded as having inferior status by the people in her village. Maya further described how she was ridiculed by some members of her community, who humiliated her with their intrusive and embarrassing questions:

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13 This is an informal settlement or slum area for landless people.
14 In Nepal, it is commonly believed that a wet utensil which has been touched by an untouchable person becomes usable only after being dried in the sun.
Some of them asked me very uncomfortable questions like how I felt having sex with many men... how much money did I make from sleeping with many Indians. (Maya)

Sushila reported being upset by comments made by some community members who believed that the returnees were destined to ‘go to hell’ due to their previous involvement in sex work. Below, she describes these superstitious beliefs:

People in our village say that returnee women from Bombay will suffer even after their death; that their soul will never be liberated, or it would go to hell. (Sushila)

Another aspect of community humiliation was accusing women of having voluntarily gone to brothels because they had been attracted to a materialistic life. Sushila described how her neighbours claimed that she willingly went to India to work in a brothel to earn money, and further humiliated her by suggesting that she may have AIDS:

My neighbours including my uncle and aunt said: ‘Look! That girl has been to the brothel in India to earn money.’ They said that they were surprised to see me at the village shortly after my trafficking. Then they said: ‘Maybe she was sacked from the brothel due to being infected with AIDS’. ‘They mocked me saying: ‘Maybe she already had earned a lot of money in a short period of time’. (Sushila)

Chaulagai (2009) claims that women who are sex trafficked are perceived to be a danger to their communities. Returnee women are regarded as ‘community destroyers’ who are likely to have contracted HIV/AIDS and therefore pose a threat to the entire village (Chaulagai 2009, p. 74). The data presented above similarly shows that the participants in this study faced hostile community attitudes and discriminatory practices when attempting to fit back into family and community life. It appears that village members discouraged the women from returning to their home and community and put pressure on their families to do the same. In order to continue living in their village where they had well established social, historical and economic ties, some parents did in fact reject their daughters despite being initially supportive. Over time, the majority of the returnees found themselves living in a relatively hostile community environment where day to day living involved humiliation and rejection.
In addition to facing negative community attitudes, the returnees also reported having difficulty returning to their previous way of life due to either their long absence from home or their poor physical and psychological health. The next section examines these difficulties.

5.3. Difficulties associated with returning to family and village life

Many participants reported that they experienced difficulties when they attempted to resume their previous work and lifestyle on returning home. Some women had become unused to heavy physical labour after working in the sex industry for a long period of time. Rural women in Nepal have onerous workloads that include heavy lifting, arduous agricultural labour and routine household chores (Brown 2003; UNICEF 2006, p. 2). Below, Thuli describes how physically difficult it was for her to do farm work again after returning to her village:

For about a month, it was difficult for me to cope with farm work; lifting loads and digging was very difficult. I got sores on my palms only after a little work. Being away from this type of work while in the brothel, my hands became soft. (Thuli)

Similarly, Deepika shared how hard it was for her to resume her previous work due to her prolonged absence from her village. As she states below, she had ‘lost the habit’ of doing hard physical labour after working in the brothel:

Living in the brothel was like less work and more rest compared to living and working in the village. It had been five years since I walked on such hills, so my legs usually got cramps ... I also had lost the habit of doing hard work such as carrying water, firewood and fodder so I felt like I could not do such a difficult job. (Deepika)

Once Chameli realised how difficult it was for her to return to arduous physical labour, she contemplated returning to the NGO in Kathmandu where she had previously resided:

Working with goats, cows and buffalos, cutting grass, cleaning the shed, removing dung, and preparing the animals’ food; those tasks were so difficult. I had to walk over the hills to fetch water. It used to be hard. After returning home I simply thought that I would not do this again and decided to return to the NGO in Kathmandu. (Chameli)

Samjana had been home for only a month at the time of interview after ten years working in a brothel in India. She was evicted from the brothel due to being frequently ill and her inability to
attract more clients. Samjana was now unused to hard physical labour and worried about how she was going to survive back in Nepal. She pointed out that at least in the brothel in Delhi, ‘we did not have to worry about our day to day survival’.

Some women were concerned about their prospects for marriage. Although Samjana was 33 years old, she described how women from her caste usually marry in their early teens:

*I do not see any possibility of marriage because I am now seen as a substandard woman, and the other thing is, in the Tamang caste women usually get married at the age of 13-14 but now I am 33.* (Samjana)

Sarala similarly expressed concern about how she was perceived as unmarriageable by her neighbours:

*My neighbours had challenged my parents saying: ‘No one would be willing to marry your daughter. We will wait and see who will marry such a woman who went to the brothel and got involved in such shameful work.’* (Sarala)

In a number of situations, the women’s poor physical health complicated their capacity to fulfil expected gender roles. A few women were sick and physically weak when they arrived home. The four returnees who had contracted HIV hid their condition from their families but lived in constant fear that their HIV status would become apparent to others. Their inability to resume a heavy workload made life with their families difficult. For example, Malati described how her uncle criticised her for not working hard enough, implying that she was a burden on her family:

*My uncle used to say, ‘You can eat, so how can you not work?’* (Malati)

A further source of stress for these returnees was their families’ expectations that they marry. Pramila explained how, despite being HIV positive, she appeared healthy to others. Her family repeatedly urged her to marry, but Pramila deliberately ignored their advice which in turn resulted in her experiencing some inner conflict:

*I have been living with this disease for years; I don’t have any symptoms or weakness. So no one ever suspects me of having HIV; they think that I am healthy and energetic. Since I have been working for all these years, no one knows about the situation I am going through.*...
because I am young everyone in my family wants to see me married and settled but I keep on ignoring their advice which sometimes makes me feel bad. (Pramila)

In summary, it is clear that many women experienced difficulties in resuming the physical labour expected of village women in Nepal after working in the brothels. For women in Nepal, fulfilling gendered role expectations is important in terms of protecting their status and ensuring their acceptance in their communities. Women are also expected to marry in Nepalese society, and it is understandable that the returnees’ diminished chances of marriage due to their trafficking backgrounds and/or HIV status was a source of concern for their families. Essentially, these women were seen to be not conforming to entrenched gender norms, which in turn heightened the potential for their social exclusion. In addition to the above challenges described by the returnees when attempting to resume their former lives, they also identified a range of emotional responses which shaped their experiences of returning home. These reactions are described below.

5.4. Emotional reactions

The returnees described a range of emotions they experienced after returning home including anger, fear, anxiety and suicidal ideation. Although Nayanshi was able to return home a month after she was trafficked, she was sexually abused by her trafficker and was kept in a locked room for eleven days prior to being sold. Below, she describes the anxiety, fear and disrupted sleep she continued to experience after returning home:

> When I just got back, I could not sleep properly at night. I even used to scream and cry involuntarily when sleeping ... I used to remain afraid most of the time. (Nayanshi)

Sushila, on the other hand, described a sense of loss and feelings of anger towards her trafficker. For Sushila, it appeared that this sense of loss related to feeling devalued and losing the respect of people:

> I had a respectful and valued life before going to India. He [her trafficker] tricked me and sold me in such a place. I can never forgive him. (Sushila)

While a few participants had contemplated or attempted suicide while living in the brothel, of some concern was that six returnees reported suicidal ideation or attempting suicide at some point after they returned to their families. The suicidal behaviours reported by the participants ranged from
simply thinking about ending their lives through to developing a plan to kill themselves, obtaining the means to do so, and attempting to carry out their plans.

Pradhan et al. (2011) notes that trafficked women in Nepal are at increased risk of poor mental health and suicide, with limited access to appropriate support after they return home. In addition, the pressure placed on women to conform to gender norms means that those women who do not adhere to gendered expectations, such as remaining a virgin until marriage, are at heightened risk of suicide due to their social isolation (Pradhan, Poudel, Thomas & Barnett 2011, p. 194). For some women in this study, financial concerns also prompted them to consider suicide. Ambika, who was married prior to being trafficked, returned to Nepal soon after exiting the brothel. However, on returning to Nepal she was rejected by her husband and faced destitution due to having no income to support her family. She subsequently planned to kill herself and her children:

> My husband did not accept me after I returned from India and we had two little children. I did not have any job and money to support myself ... So I attempted to take poison. My initial plan was to feed poison first to my children and then to have it myself, but for some reason I was unable to do that on that day. (Ambika)

Fortunately, Ambika did not carry out her plan and managed to find work in Kathmandu. Sila similarly contemplated killing herself after returning home. Lured by her traffickers to India with the promise of better employment, she describes how she blamed herself for her trafficking and decided to end her life after being rejected by her family upon her return:

> My life had been full of struggle after I returned home, mainly due to a lack of support from my brother and sister-in-law ... I could not find any way out so I thought about dying. What else could I do? I also thought maybe it was my own fault because I was too ‘chanchale’ [exuberance of youth] and made the wrong choice to go to India to earn money. So I blamed myself for everything that happened to me. (Sila)

Deepika was trafficked by her husband along with her fifteen month old son. On returning to Nepal, an NGO worker suggested she file a case against him. As a result, her husband was imprisoned. At that time, she became preoccupied with the thought of death, believing that dying would be the best option for her. However, her concern for her son’s welfare stopped her carrying out this plan:
The thought of dying used to occupy my mind ... but I also thought that it would be a selfish decision ... What would happen to my son if I was dead? Who will take care of him? His father is in prison and if I die he will become an orphan ... It would have been easy to make this decision if I had no son. (Deepika)

Discrimination by the community emerged as a significant factor which directly contributed to some women’s suicidal ideation. Below, Poonam describes how she thought it would be better for her to die than to be continually subject to people’s derogatory comments:

People called me a prostitute and ‘Bombay bata farkiyeki’ (a returnee woman from Bombay). It used to be very difficult to endure those words so I started thinking that it would be better to die than to bear such humiliations. (Poonam)

All four women who were HIV positive described their emotional distress after finding out they had contracted the virus. One of the participants, Malati, said that she had planned to kill herself once she had reached the final stage of AIDS:

I had thought that it would be more difficult for me and also for my family when I reached my last stage from this disease, so I thought of committing suicide ... (Malati)

It is apparent that the women’s emotional distress was compounded by their struggle to find acceptance and support in their families and communities. Nonetheless, the returnees also demonstrated resilience in the face of their struggles and focused on their day-to-day survival. The following section explores the ways that they managed family and community hostility and attempted to gain acceptance.

5.5. Survival strategies
This section focuses on the strategies the participants used to survive family and village life, particularly in the earlier days of their arrival. Data analysis elicited four themes pertaining to these survival strategies: reconstructing the trafficking experience; non-disclosure of HIV status; ignoring negative comments from others; and conforming to the gendered role of a submissive daughter or wife.

Maintaining secrecy is one of the ways formerly sex trafficked women attempt to avoid stigmatisation and the negative connotations associated with prostitution (Brunovskis & Surtees
Several participants in this study attempted to conceal their trafficking by constructing a story to explain their absence from the village. This was more of an option for those women who returned independently of NGOs. For example, Samjana, created a story that she had been working overseas:

*I have been telling everyone in the community that I returned from the Maldives ... but as you [interviewer] already know, I have returned from a brothel in India.* (Samjana)

Similarly, some women hid being infected with HIV/AIDS from their family and their community as a way of coping with community discrimination. As mentioned earlier, Pramila kept her HIV status secret when she returned to her village. However, she also had to construct a story as to why she did not want to get married on her return:

*My family suggested to me that I marry after I returned home. I pretended that I did not have a desire to be married. When I was with them I hid many of my worries and realities including being infected with HIV.* (Pramila)

Concealing a story of trafficking or hiding being infected with HIV helped some women to minimise family and community stigma to some extent, and fulfil their immediate quest of fitting back in with their family in the community. However, this option was not open to those participants whose trafficking experiences were known to others.

Many women feared that any confrontation with family and community would lead to constant questioning and conflict with others. Therefore not responding to any negative comments emerged as one way that some returnees attempted to manage negative community attitudes on returning home. For example, Kamala described how she remained quiet when facing the villagers’ queries about her time in the brothel:

*How could I answer or reply to the villagers about what I did over there (in the brothel) and what I had been through? So I remained quiet.* (Kamala)

Sarala similarly recalled how she used to remain silent when the villagers harassed her about her trafficking experiences. After realising that her status had been diminished and that she had no way of restoring her reputation in the villagers’ eyes, she came to the conclusion that silence was her best defence:
I was aware that I could not shut their mouths by arguing with them because, at that time, I was not in a position to change my status; nor could I stop them from talking badly about me. So, I argued with them only from the inside—silently. But they shouted at me openly. (Sarala)

For many women, their feelings of powerlessness were often reinforced by customary negative attitudes and practices towards women in Nepal. To cope with these circumstances, some women described how they acted in a submissive manner along with silently enduring verbal abuse. Sarala described her willingness to submit to the villagers’ demands and act in a subservient manner in order to retain some level of acceptance in her community:

I had to tolerate the hate and humiliation expressed toward me by others in the village for being trafficked ... If I do whatever they want me to do, if I massage their feet ... it is acceptable for them. But if I don’t obey them or argue with them, they bring up the fact that I was previously involved in sex work. They always look for a chance to humiliate me because I had been to such a place. (Sarala)

Poonam describes how she silently endured both her own family’s and her parents-in-law’s directives and humiliation in the earlier days of her arrival. After returning to Nepal, Poonam’s stepmother had arranged her marriage to a man five years her junior whose family owned a large plot of farmland. After her marriage, Poonam was treated like the family slave:

After my marriage I was asked to work hard on the farm, carrying manure, planting paddies and many other jobs on the farm, as well as in the house ... My husband could not speak any words supporting me because he was still treated as a minor. Not only did I have to work a lot, I also had to bear humiliation because my in-laws used to say very bad things to me like, ‘It seems you did not have enough sex in the brothel, so you agreed to marry this young boy.’ But I could not reply with a single word to them because I was told to respect them. (Poonam)

These findings suggest that the women’s ways of coping after returning home were deeply embedded in their sociocultural context and influenced by the gender role expectations of their family and community. The cultural values, beliefs and norms regarding women in Nepal require them to be non-argumentative and subordinate to men (Bennett 1983; Rajbhandari 2003). In this
context, some returnee women recognised that strictly conforming to these gender norms was their only way of surviving village life.

Nonetheless, many women eventually came to the realisation that they could no longer stay in their villages due to the hostility expressed towards them by their families or community members. Others interpreted the actions and comments of their family and community as a demand they should leave. The next section shows how most of the returnees eventually chose to leave their family and community and moved to Kathmandu.

5.6. The decision to move away from home and village

For women in Nepal, moving away from home challenges entrenched gender norms for them to remain part of their family and community. Despite these strong social sanctions, eventually thirteen women left their families and moved to Kathmandu. The main factors underpinning their decision to leave were community discrimination, poor physical health and the belief that more opportunities would be open to them in Kathmandu. The decision to leave was usually made in consultation with family, but in a few cases the women themselves, decided to leave home.

The decision to leave home for many came as a result of community discrimination. For example, Sushila explained how her parents encouraged her to leave to escape the ongoing hatred of the community:

*My parents told me that it would be better for me if I lived outside rather than at home in the village. They had said if I remained in the village, the villagers will hate me and spit at me.* (Sushila)

Rama, who was pregnant as a result of being raped by a policeman after returning to Nepal, decided to return to Kathmandu when villagers started gossiping about her pregnancy and previous trafficking history:

*People in our village and community started gossiping about me, so I didn’t like to stay there ... I preferred to move away from such a place.* (Rama)

Sila’s decision to move to Kathmandu was prompted by her sister-in-law’s ongoing victimisation of her which made life very difficult for her at home. In addition, she realised that her family’s reputation was suffering while she remained at home:
My sister-in-law constantly called me ‘randi’ (a prostitute). It was difficult to live with her ... So to save the reputation of my family ... I decided to move to Kathmandu. (Sila)

As a result of both poverty and negative societal attitudes, some participants were advised by their families to move to accommodation provided by NGOs for their own benefit. Nepal is one of the world’s poorest countries where food insecurity is a major challenge (Scalise 2009). Poverty was commonplace for many of the returnee women. Nayanshi reported how her parents started to worry that her presence back in the family could lower their family’s reputation in the community and therefore limit the marital prospects of her unmarried siblings. As a consequence of her family’s poor economic situation and the fact that they thought she was unmarriageable due to being trafficked, Nayanshi’s parents sent her to her former NGO both for her safety and future wellbeing:

It was a hard time for my parents because they have four daughters and the family situation became worse after my arrival. If something bad happens to girls in our caste, the whole family suffers ... in order to marry us daughters with rich men, my father has to pay more dowry to the groom’s side. Nowadays a man who does not have much property also asks for more cash or a piece of land ... Since I had a permanent stain in my character he could not afford my marriage and also my presence in family ... So my father suggested I go back to the NGO which was involved in my rescue and continue my study. (Nayanshi)

It is apparent from the women’s stories that they and their families were attracted to the services offered by the internationally funded NGOs, which were often not affordable for women living independently or with their families. For some, the possibility of accessing these services seemed more attractive that than the difficult process of reintegrating into family and community life. For example, Deepika’s mother urged her to live in an NGO so that she and her son could gain a better education than was available in her village:

I know it is very hard to live outside because the price of everything is going up and renting a room is unaffordable. But living in the organisation was free; my son and I could get a free education. So my mother suggested I stay in the organisation for the education of my son and also for my welfare. (Deepika)

For other returnees, poor physical health was the impetus for them leaving home. Poonam related how being sick, lacking family support, and having no opportunity to access health care prompted
her to leave her family and move to Kathmandu. Of some concern was that she left home without a firm plan about what she would do next:

*Due to being involved in extreme physical work, no matter whether it was raining or sunny, I became sick and bed bound. At that time, I did not have control over my urination. My family did not seek any treatment for me due to the fear of losing their money. I spent days in hunger when I was in bed ... After I recovered a bit, I left my home and family and came to Kathmandu. I did not carry money and did not have a plan for where I would go before leaving home.* (Poonam)

The above findings demonstrate that although the participants adopted a range of strategies to fit back into family and village life, many eventually moved to Kathmandu due to the hostility and discrimination they experienced in their villages. For some returnees, the decision to leave was made after a few days or weeks, while for others it came as a result of the ongoing challenges they experienced living with family and community over time.

### 5.7. Chapter summary and conclusion

The extent of support that women received from their family and community appeared as the major determining factor regarding the prospect and sustainability of women’s integration into family and community life. The data suggests that the majority of the women received largely positive responses or mixed responses from their parents and in a few cases they were rejected. However, community members actively resisted the return of the women. Returnees became victims of everyday gossiping, humiliation and discrimination. The family of one returnee was displaced from their original community where they had lived for generations due to allowing their daughter back into the family.

It is recognised that if women return to a dysfunctional family or poor social support systems in their communities, they are placed back in the same circumstances with create the conditions for trafficking (Huntington 2002; Pandey, Tewari & Bhowmick 2013). It is imperative that rehabilitation and reintegration programs are sensitive to individual women’s needs and strengthen their social circumstances. Nonetheless the findings suggest that in some situations the NGOs which were involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration of the trafficked women disregarded their needs and vulnerabilities in returning to their families.
The returnee women were denied basic rights as a member of their family and community after they returned home due to the prevalence of stigma, discrimination and rejection. They demonstrated resilience in the face of these pressures by using different survival strategies ranging from hiding some issues surrounding their trafficking to altering their stories to explain their absence in a more favourable light. Another survival strategy employed by the returnees was remaining silent in the face of harassment or verbal abuse by villagers, which in turn assisted them to avoid confrontation. This coping strategy of silent endurance appears to be deeply influenced by the gender-role expectations for women in Nepal. Moreover, given the limited avenues for formal complaint available to returnees, there is little pressure for communities to change their attitudes and behaviours that subject these women to further degrading treatment and abuse.

While living independently is not in accord with societal norms for Nepalese women, the majority of women made the choice to leave their families and live in the city. For most of the women, social discrimination or a desire to escape the drudgery of agriculture labouring was the impetus for them to leave. In other cases, poor physical health, including being infected with HIV/AIDS, had created obstacles in their integration attempts. Some of the women and their families believed that they would be better supported by anti-trafficking NGOs than remaining with their families or living independently.

It is important to point out that making the decision to leave their families and communities was not the preferred option for most participants but indicative of the limited options open to them and their constrained autonomy. As indicated in Chapter Four, the returnees had been initially excited about the prospect of being reunited with their families and expressed a strong desire to return home. However, thirteen of the women eventually left their villages after realising that it was not viable for them to remain in their villages due to ongoing discrimination or lack of support. The next chapter explores the returnee’s ongoing experiences in terms of the barriers and supportive factors that shaped their longer term reintegration.
6. Chapter Six: Experiences of reintegration over time: barriers and supportive factors

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter the eighteen returnee women who attempted to reunite with their families recalled their initial experiences of going back to their family and their community after returning to Nepal. Irrespective of how long the women stayed in their village, all experienced significant challenges during the initial time of reunification with their family. While the majority of families were welcoming to their daughters, community members appeared to be far more negative and discriminatory in their initial responses to the returnees than were families.

Ten women left their families and villages after a relatively short period of time. Subsequently another three women reported leaving after twelve months to four years. Just five women remained in their village at the time of interview. Of these five, one woman had been there for only one month on her return from India. She reported that she was sent home due to having an ‘incurable illness’. Although she was bedbound at the time of interview, she did not plan to continue living with her family in her village and intended to go to Kathmandu after she recovered to seek work.

This chapter continues the exploration of the women’s experiences following their initial reunion with their families and their attempts to interact with others in their village. Of the thirteen women who left their village, some approached NGOs in Kathmandu for shelter and support, while others chose to live independently. As time progressed, some of the women living independently in Kathmandu married, as did four of the five women who remained in the village. These four married women moved to their respective husband’s house located in a different village, but not far from their village of origin. At the time of interview the living arrangements and marital status of the twenty participants can be grouped as follows:

Village setting:
- Single and living with parents (one)
- Married and living with husband’s family in husband’s village (four)

Urban setting of Kathmandu:
- Single and living independently (four)
- Married and living with husband (four)

NGO in Kathmandu
- Single or separated women living in NGOs (seven)
The findings presented in this chapter suggest that all participants, irrespective of living arrangements, marital status, and other social factors such as health status or employment, continued to experience significant barriers to reintegration. Of particular concern were barriers related to: discriminatory societal and cultural practices; lack of employment, training and safe living options; limited access to health resources; and lack of support regarding the trauma they had experienced through being trafficked. The specific nature of these barriers differed to some extent according to the setting in which the woman lived. Yet, despite the extensive and deeply entrenched barriers to reintegration reported, the women could also identify ways in which the process of reintegration was facilitated. This chapter therefore attempts to capture the participants’ ongoing experiences of reintegration, with a focus on barriers and facilitators to reintegration in three different settings: the village, urban Kathmandu and NGOs in Kathmandu.

6.2. Life in the village

As discussed previously, five women were living with their families in their villages at the time of interview and one had been there only one month. This section presents the challenges and the supportive factors experienced over time by the four women who continued to live in their villages for more than seven years. These returnees reported being subject to ongoing stigmatisation and discrimination on the basis of being former sex workers. Nevertheless, they also perceived that their circumstances, no matter how difficult, were preferable to living in a brothel. Three main themes emerged from these women’s accounts: their constrained economic circumstances; ongoing abuse and varying levels of exclusion from family and community; and the importance of having a supportive husband and family.

6.2.1. The struggle to survive

All four women who were living in villages struggled economically as a result of their poor marriageability, lack of assets and, for some, poor health. There are complex connections between marriage, land ownership, inheritance laws and financial security for women in Nepal. Marriage is considered important for both social and economic reasons, including ensuring women’s ongoing livelihood (Acharya, Mathema & Acharya 1999, p. 7). Traditionally, girls are expected to marry at a young age and to leave their parents’ home after marriage. Once married, a woman must remain faithful to her husband in order to inherit his land. Infidelity is a punishable offence and an ‘unchaste wife’ loses the right to inherit her husband’s property (Mathema 1998, p. 589).
In rural areas, people mostly follow customary laws and practices by which a daughter does not inherit parental property, especially land.\textsuperscript{15} The implication of these property laws for the returnees was that their main path to financial stability was through marriage, or remarriage, which in turn enabled legal access to their husband’s home, land and other property. However, Nepalese cultural norms require that women are virgins before marriage and preferably young (Bennett 1983; Puri, Tamang & Shah 2011). Clearly, the participants could not fulfil these main cultural requirements of marriageability, since many had spent their formative years in forced sex work in a brothel. This in turn severely limited their marriage prospects. Below Sarala described how due to being sex trafficked she felt she had no choice other than to marry an older and, in her eyes, an ‘undesirable’ man:

\begin{quote}
I married him due to having no choice. I was trafficked before, so after coming back to my village my status became inferior. My husband was old ... Although he had married twice before, he had no wife then since one had already died and another had left him. So, I agreed to marry an old man after considering my own situation. (Sarala)
\end{quote}

Sarala further described how hard it had been for her to manage both family and work life due to her husband’s limited ability to carry out household tasks and his controlling behaviour:

\begin{quote}
My husband is in his critical age. He does not contribute much in doing household work ... I have to manage the house, farm, substitute labouring, two young children and an old husband, on my own. My husband is good because he married me despite knowing my background, but he has one bad habit. He gets angry and cranky every now and then if I do not feed the cattle on time or if I do not come home early from work. (Sarala)
\end{quote}

Mailee perceived herself as a woman of lower status due to losing her ‘izzet’ [dignity/ virginity] in the brothel. Her family received a marriage proposal for her from a local man from her village who did not have his own home and land. Nonetheless, she agreed to marry him, which meant living in poverty as tenant farmers. She described the uncertainty of her current living circumstances due to being dependent on the goodwill of her landlord:

\begin{quote}
15In Nepal, sons are usually first in line to inherit their father’s property. However, a daughter retains the right to inherit her father’s property if she is still single upon reaching the age of 35. If she subsequently marries she must return her share of the property (Mathema 1998).
\end{quote}
On returning home, my parents arranged my marriage with a man who did not have his own house and land. Now, we live in our landlord’s house and work on his land. That man has another house in Kathmandu where he lives with his family. He had initially assured us that he would give us a little bit of land from his property because of working on his land and looking after his property. But he has not visited us for months. We heard from his relatives who live in this village that he has already sold the property. (Mailee)

Thuli similarly married a poor man who had only a small plot of land equivalent to a kitchen garden. After her husband passed away, Thuli was left with the responsibility of raising four daughters and had to rely on seasonal agricultural work. She described the financial pressures associated with not having a regular income:

I have the responsibility of four daughters ... I have to manage food, clothes and other necessities but I do not have any reliable sources of income. I occasionally find some daily wages job and some seasonal jobs ... now it is the time of paddy harvesting, so I am working for other people in harvesting. (Thuli)

Thuli further described how being a woman and not having any ownership of assets restricted her ability to obtain credit from the bank:

Do you think that a bank trusts me to provide a loan? I put on a bloody sari, so the bank had no confidence that I would be able to make the repayments; if I wore a topi [a male hat] then a bank would trust me. Anyway, to tell the truth, to take a loan from the bank, we need to have some assets such as land and a house or a milking buffalo, or goats and cattle. I don’t have any basis to ask for a loan from the bank and the bank doesn’t trust me in this situation. (Thuli)

As is evident from these three participants’ accounts, the returnees living in villages struggled to fulfil their basic daily needs and faced financial insecurity. This was a result of lacking the culturally valued marriage attributes of virginity and youth and having to marry ‘less desirable’ men with limited or no assets. In the rural villages where there is a land-based economy, having no land limited their agricultural production and also hindered their ability to obtain credit in order to start

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16The economic situation of the fourth participant who remained in the village, Kamala, is elaborated on in a case study in Chapter Seven.
their own small business or increase their number of livestock. Consequently, all four returnees who were married and living in villages at the time of interview were largely involved in traditional work roles such as household work, agriculture and livestock rearing. This work often did not generate a cash income and these returnees faced the constant threat of poverty.

6.2.2. Ongoing abuse and exclusion from family and community

In Nepal, violence against women is commonplace and women may be verbally and physically abused not just by their partners, but also other members of their extended family (Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights 1998). Similarly, some of the married returnees who were living with their families reported that they were abused by their in-laws, relatives and neighbours. Kamala, for example, related how her mother-in-law spat in her face and did not allow her to serve her food after her marriage. A daughter-in-law is usually subordinate to her mother-in-law, who holds a higher position in the family (Luitel 2001). Consequently, Kamala had limited power in this situation. In addition, she described how her neighbours tried to turn her husband against her by talking about her in derogatory terms:

_They [neighbours] tried to brainwash my husband saying: ‘Your wife was a returnee woman’. They are also encouraging him to find another woman. They are such bastards (rada-radiharu)! (Kamala)_

Sarala, who had been living in her husband’s village for thirteen years after returning to Nepal, described being constantly humiliated by the villagers who knew she had been trafficked. Sarala and her husband had borrowed money to buy land, but the villagers assumed that she had earned the money from sex work and tried to prevent the sale.

_My neighbour said humiliating things when we attempted to buy a little land for cultivation. They said: ‘You shameless woman, you exposed your private parts to many people. So ... you cannot use that money from bad work to buy land in our village’ (Sarala)_

Most of the returnee women living in the village said that they were often referred to as ‘bombay-wali’ or other derogatory terms for formerly sex trafficked women. Although all the participants had been trafficked involuntary, in the eyes of their family and community they had been involved in a degrading and taboo activity. Interestingly, Thuli commented that it was commonplace for women in her village, trafficked or not, to be abused and called degrading names:
In our village it is common for women to suffer from domestic violence and false accusations from their husband and in-laws. They usually abuse them saying ‘Assa randi, tesa randi’ [Hindi term for a prostitute]. (Thuli)

As discussed in Chapter Two, violence against women is embedded in the social, political and legal structure of Nepalese society and women are treated as second class citizens. While not condoning these behaviours, Thuli appeared to rationalise these villagers’ behaviour as a reflection of entrenched dominant beliefs about gendered norms for women. In turn, she implies that the onus is on returnees to be tolerant of such attitudes, rather than on the community to question the fairness of their behaviour and attitudes:

We understand why they are saying such bad things to us. In speaking the truth, what they are saying about us is right; we all know what we did in the brothel. (Thuli)

In contrast, Sarala described standing up for herself in an encounter with a neighbour who had tried to humiliate her in public:

Once, one of my neighbours tried to humiliate me in front of a large number of people. He kept on reminding them that I was a prostitute before. At that time, my head started spinning. I didn’t remain quiet. I asked him ‘Have you ever seen me doing (this) work here in this village? Did you see with your own eyes what I did over there? If you are keen to know what I did over there, you can send your own wife because she is also young and beautiful.’ In that way I shut his mouth. What could I do? I didn’t know of any other better way to protect myself. (Sarala)

Nonetheless, as indicated in Chapter Five, many of the returnees silently endured the negative treatment meted out to them by community or family members and challenging derogatory comments was more the exception than the norm.

Some returnee women also described religious and cultural exclusion such as not being permitted to worship the family deity or cook and serve food for special religious occasions. Mailee elaborated on this form of exclusion and the beliefs underpinning these practices:

In our culture, trafficked women are not allowed to perform some cultural and religious rites. There is a belief that offering ‘tika and achhayata’ [a form of worshipping God] from
the hands of trafficked women is not acceptable to God. Returnee women are in some cases prevented from attending wedding celebrations, and religious functions. (Mailee)

In sum, the returnees living in villages were marginalised socially and economically and suffered further abuse, as well as exclusion from certain religious and cultural activities. Nevertheless, they also identified supportive factors which facilitated their reintegration into village life. These factors are discussed in the next section.

6.2.3. Building family support and regaining status

In order to explore factors that may have enabled the women to rebuild their lives, the returnees were asked about factors that facilitated their reintegration into village life. Having a supportive husband and family appeared to be the main factors that assisted these women’s reintegration. For those women who married after returning to Nepal, it appeared that being someone’s wife conferred some measure of social status, which in turn deterred other people from making derogatory comments about them. Thuli reflected that having a supportive husband had made her life more meaningful and had protected her to some extent from villagers’ negative comments on her trafficking background:

In my case my husband loved me and accepted me despite knowing my background, so other people were reluctant to say anything bad to me as I was someone’s wife ... but it is sad that he is now no more. (Thuli)

Despite her sadness, Thuli reflected that after her husband died she gained some additional respect on the basis of being a widow. Respect for widows is common to most Nepali castes and ethnic groups (Robins 2011), so Thuli’s widowed status served in her favour. Sarala similarly identified how having a supportive husband assisted her to gain respect from others. Additionally she remarked that strictly conforming to local cultural norms helped her to be accepted by the villagers:

Now I am a wife of someone from this village. So, they [the villagers] do not have any right to say anything bad to me. It is also true that I have adopted every rule of this society. More than that, my husband adores me, which made it possible for me to live in this village. (Sarala)
In addition, Sarala believed that having three sons was a blessing. Being a mother of sons in a patriarchal society such as Nepal affords women more power and authority, which Sarala perceived as being advantageous for her future welfare:

*Through the grace of God, I have three sons. I think my future is now secure ... the other thing is I have cattle in my shed, therefore I have peace of mind.* (Sarala)

Mailee’s husband knew of her sex trafficking prior to their marriage and she reflected that, despite this knowledge, he had still accepted her. She believed this was a key factor in her ability to lead what she described as a ‘respectable’ life’ in the village:

*He accepted me after knowing the truth; we were married and committed for a lifelong relationship.* (Mailee)

Interestingly, she also nominated her involvement with a self-help organisation run by formerly trafficked women as another factor that had assisted in restoring her self-esteem. Although her involvement with this organisation had inadvertently drawn the other villagers’ attention to her trafficking history, Mailee appeared to be able to manage this by focusing on her campaigning work:

*I feel good about myself that I am working for the prevention of girls’ trafficking. Human trafficking has spread all over the country ... so personally I would like to be involved in the campaign to stop human trafficking.* (Mailee)

These women’s accounts suggest that despite their constrained economic circumstances and varying levels of exclusion from family, community and religious activities, having a supportive husband, family and friends were mitigating factors that, to a degree, restored their status in their community. In contrast to these returnees, the women who left their families and commenced living independently in Kathmandu lacked these supportive networks. These women’s experiences are canvassed below.

6.3. Independent living

As indicated in Chapter Five, the thirteen women who eventually left home and moved to Kathmandu did so for a variety of reasons including family rejection, poor health, or limited employment options. Six women returned to NGOs and seven women commenced living
independently. Of these seven women, three married after some time while the other four stayed single.

The immediate challenge facing the women who moved to Kathmandu was that they were vulnerable to harm. This vulnerability was compounded by their low educational status, lack of skills to gain employment, limited finances, and inability to access family support. Nevertheless, these returnees were also able to exercise some control over their identity and life choices, and had relatively more freedom than their counterparts living in the villages. In addition, living far away from their family’s village afforded them some protection from the prejudicial attitudes and gossiping of the local people who knew they had been trafficked. This section charts these returnees’ experiences from their immediate arrival in Kathmandu to their living arrangements at the time of interview. It highlights the risks and difficulties associated with independent living for these women, as well as how their resilience and newfound autonomy assisted them to rebuild their lives.

6.3.1. Vulnerability to harm and further exploitation

A common challenge that the returnees experienced after leaving their families and arriving in Kathmandu was finding safe and affordable shelter. Most of the women had no or limited money when they arrived and sought temporary shelter at friends’ places. Sila approached a well-known anti-trafficking NGO for assistance after arriving in Kathmandu. However, instead of being offered support she described how she was treated with suspicion by the staff:

*On my arrival, I approached one of the renowned anti-trafficking organisations of Nepal. I informed them that I had escaped from the brothel and returned to Nepal by myself, and asked them for temporary shelter and to prosecute the people who sold me. I had no wish to keep mentioning my defamed past ... But they didn’t help me. Instead they asked to see my return ticket from India. At that time, I felt incredibly bad. I felt like crying. I had heard that that the organisation was a good organisation that helped girls who had been trafficked, but how I felt after was that instead of helping girls who had been trafficked, they make them vulnerable to re-trafficking. (Sila)*

Sila’s experience suggests that as an independent returnee, she did not fit the stereotypical image of sex trafficked women who are rescued and brought back to Nepal via the intervention of anti-trafficking organisations (Frederick 2005). As a result, she attracted suspicion and the NGO’s
refusal to help her compounded her existing distress. Notably, she commented that this sort of treatment makes women vulnerable to being re-trafficked.

Beset by financial problems and a lack of safe shelter, the women were placed at risk of further abuse and exploitation. Poonam describes how, despite finding a job quite quickly, she became vulnerable to sexual exploitation after commencing independent living:

*I did suffer a lot when I was trying to find a room and a job in Kathmandu. However, within a week I got a job in a restaurant ... The owner arranged a room for me, but after a few days he started sending me to his guests to sleep with them in the guest house.* (Poonam)

As an unaccompanied woman lacking the protection of a male relative or guardian, Poonam was a ready target for further exploitation by her employer. She quickly left this job and then commenced a dishwashing job where she was again subjected to sexual harassment:

*I faced challenges while doing the dishwashing job too. Being young, men in the household used to view me with a bad intention. One day, as I was about to return to my room after finishing my job, the owner asked me to do the other thing [indicated having sex]; he kept me at his house and that night I was able to escape, but without my clothes.* (Poonam)

Similarly, Ambika, who was left by her husband after she returned from India, described how living independently as a single woman aroused suspicion and placed her at risk of sexual exploitation:

*I used to live alone in a rented room. People used to talk about me. They would say ‘How can that woman live alone and afford renting a room?’ Some men even intended to take advantage of my situation of being alone.* (Ambika)

Prior to returning to her family’s village, Rama had become pregnant after being raped in Kathmandu. She left home after a few months and returned to Kathmandu. By that time she was heavily pregnant. Needing to earn money, she started working in the same carpet factory from where she was initially trafficked and later gave birth to her son. With no one to support her during the birth, she described how difficult this time was and how she nearly died:

*At the time of the birth of my son I suffered a lot. I was close to death ... I was taken to hospital by a stranger and she left me there. It was very difficult for me to work in the carpet
factory so early, immediately after the birth ... I used to put my son in a shawl next to my chair and sometimes I put him in my lap ... My wound had not healed, so it used to hurt very badly, but I did not have any other option for my survival. (Rama)

Being constrained by her poor economic circumstances and having no one to support her and her son in Kathmandu, Rama felt she had no option but to enter into a sexual relationship with a man who already had two wives:

_I was really in need of someone who would support me. I met him when I was having a difficult time in Kathmandu. As he already had two wives and four children he did not have any interest in marrying me, but he helped me with food and paying rent for some years._ (Rama)

Like Rama, all of the women who moved to Kathmandu were financially vulnerable and faced significant challenges in adequately providing for themselves and their children. The challenges these women faced in finding employment to meet their basic survival needs are outlined below.

**6.3.2. Surviving life in Kathmandu**

In the absence of support from their family or from external sources such as NGOs, the women who moved to Kathmandu had to find paid work in order to survive. Two of the women, Ambika and Rama, had the additional responsibility of supporting their children. While they all eventually found paid work, the jobs they obtained were described as difficult and paid barely enough to cover their basic needs. These jobs included carpet weaving, labouring, dish washing, security work and waitressing. Only one participant (Smiriti) from this group had completed high school. Many others had never been sent to school or had dropped out of primary or secondary school and a few had to leave their schooling due to being trafficked. Poonam, who had never been to school and had no citizenship certificate due to being trafficked at a young age, soon realised that these factors severely restricted her job options:

_After coming to Kathmandu I started looking for a job. Some employers asked me to provide my educational background and citizenship certificate but I did not have either._ (Poonam)

Because Nepalese woman cannot apply for citizenship independently of a male relative such as a husband or father, formerly trafficked women who have been sold or rejected by their families are particularly at risk of being denied their citizenship rights. A lack of citizenship, limits access to
work, education and health services (Laczo 2003, p. 77). As indicated in the previous section, the only job option initially open to Poonam was restaurant work, which left her vulnerable to further exploitation, a situation which was compounded by her lack of citizenship rights.

Many women reported that the jobs they found did not provide adequate wages to survive in Kathmandu. Rama, who lived with her son, eventually set up her own street based stall. She described how she survived on limited food, stating: ‘I could not afford meals three times a day’. A further concern was that she and her son were at risk of being evicted from their current accommodation due to their inability to pay the rent. Compounding this situation was Rama’s poor health, which she describes below:

I have not paid rent for my room for the last four months so the house owner has already told me to leave his property ... I have suffered a lot in my life! I do not have any home or land even in the village ... These days I have blurred vision at night time. My hands and legs usually get numb and are swollen ... I am susceptible to cold; my stomach used to swell up but I have not visited a doctor for a long time. I also had a problem with my uterus some years ago. After that I had surgery on my uterus but since then I have felt pain if I lift any heavy object. (Rama)

Lack of affordable health care was an additional problem for most of the returnees who moved to Kathmandu. For some women, their poor physical health meant they could not work in industries which required heavy physical labour. Ambika found work as a support worker in a hospital but her health problems led her to consider quitting her job:

We are required to be involved in heavy lifting tasks every day such as carrying oxygen cylinders from one floor to another and carrying sick patients. The problem is I cannot walk fast and lift heavy things; if I walk a bit faster or lift something heavy I get pain in my uterus ... So I am thinking of leaving my current job. (Ambika)

Both Ambika and Sita had contemplated going overseas to gain employment while others said that they would like to open their own business such as a street based stall. Ambika had considered both options but lack of money was the primary obstacle she faced in achieving her goals:

I know some basic accounting skills like how to keep a record of income and expenses; therefore I would like to be involved in some small business. To start your own business,
money is the first thing, but I don’t have any money ... The other option available to me is going abroad to work and earn money. To do this I also need money. (Ambika)

In sum, the returnee women living independently in Kathmandu experienced significant challenges in finding work and ensuring their day-to-day survival. The jobs they eventually found were poorly paid and the money was barely enough to cover their basic needs. Those returnees in poor health described not being able to access adequate health care and being at risk of losing their jobs. In addition, they were isolated from their families and friends. This aspect of their experience is explored below.

6.3.3. Rejection and isolation from family

The participants who were living independently reported that they had limited or no contact with their families and communities after they left their home. While Pramila wanted to keep some distance from her family, Sanu, Sila and Smiriti desired more contact with their families, but said that their families did not show any interest in them. Therefore, social isolation was a common experience for these women. Being away from their village of origin, many women also described a loss of involvement in valued social and cultural activities. Sanu described how she would like to return to her village at festival time, but believed if she did so this would make her family uncomfortable:

Samajik bahiskar [social exclusion] is the bitterest experience of our lives and this is not in our control ... now I live in Kathmandu away from my family. Sometimes I would like to visit them, mostly at a festival time, but I know that they do not like my presence ... so I do not like to worsen their festive mood by visiting them. (Sanu)

Ambika was married with two children at the time of her trafficking. On her return she and her two children were left by her husband. While living in Kathmandu, an NGO had provided shelter, support and education for her children. However, her children grieved the loss of their father, while Ambika felt a sense of isolation as a single parent:

My children want to reunite with their father. They want their father to look after them and offer love and care to them. It is also difficult for me to live alone in this condition. I am afraid of marrying for the second time because it is possible that my children would be abused by their step-father. Anyway, it is the saddest part of our life that our family was shattered after that incident. (Ambika)
A further concern was that Ambika was being pressured by friends of her traffickers to retract her statement after they were sent to prison. Living by herself in Kathmandu, she felt vulnerable to further harm and believed that her life was at risk:

*My traffickers are now in prison but their friends and relatives want to see him freed from prison. Nowadays, they often come to visit me. They have also offered a large sum of money as they want me to alter my statement. I am anxious thinking that they can do something bad to me at any time. As they know where I live and work, I do not feel my life is safe.* (Ambika)

Smiriti’s sense of isolation was similarly exacerbated by the death threats she received from the friends of her trafficker. While one of her traffickers had been apprehended and charged, she was aware that the others were still at large. Having limited support available to her from friends and family, she lived in a state of constant anxiety:

*Only one of the traffickers has been caught and sentenced to prison. The others are still outside, and they are hiding from the police. They have threatened to kill me.* (Smiriti)

Pramila, who was unmarried and living with HIV, revealed her fears about what would happen to her when her disease progressed and she was no longer able to look after herself. She equated marriage with economic security and emotional support, but explained how difficult it would be to find an appropriate marriage partner:

*Now I am young and healthy and have supported myself, but when I get old or sick who will look after me? I am thinking of entering into marital life with a person who also has HIV. Marriage offers a woman the privilege to be supported by her husband and to rely on him, but it is hard to get an eligible man from a desirable place and background who would be suitable for me.* (Pramila)

Marriage was a key objective for most of the returnees and, at the time of interview, four of the eight women who moved to Kathmandu had found a husband. This in turn provided them with a semblance of respectability and, in some cases, greater economic security. However, married life posed new challenges for these returnees, including fulfilling the expectations of their husbands and in-laws. These challenges are discussed in the next section.
6.3.4. Challenges in marital life

For those women who elected to keep their trafficking history a secret from their husbands or their husbands’ families, one of the constant stressors they faced was the fear of people finding out about their past. Sila, for example, was worried that she would lose the respect of her mother-in-law if she ever found out that she had been trafficked for sex work:

*On my husband’s side, only my husband knows that I was trafficked for sex work. His family do not know my background. To date, his mother treats me with respect when I visit her ... Actually, she admires me more than my husband’s sister-in-law so she is very envious of me. But I fear that one day she might dig out my past.* (Sila)

Sila further described how from time to time her husband would humiliate her by bringing up her past, especially when they argued. In this way, he used this knowledge as a form of control over her:

*Just the other day, we had a big argument and family dispute. Sometimes he calls me bad things ... [because] I was sold in the past.* (Sila)

Poonam, who had remarried after moving to Kathmandu, similarly expressed her anxiety about how her husband and his family would react if her past was revealed. For Poonam, an additional issue at stake was her loss of status and community acceptance:

*You may not know how hard it is for a trafficked girl to be accepted by this society. Our boys especially are so rigid; they do not like to accept sexually trafficked women as their wives, the same as girls who previously have had sexual relations with other men. If they know their wife is a previous sex worker this hurts their manhood. Therefore to maintain peace in our family life I kept my brothel work a secret. My father-in-law is a good man and he treats me nicely since he does not know my past, but I am afraid he will find out.* (Poonam)

Poonam was also experiencing difficulties in conceiving a child, which she believed was due to her previous involvement in sex work. This heightened her emotional distress. She described how being childless threatened her prospects of inheriting property from her father-in-law:
My husband and I wanted to have a baby but the doctor told us that I could not conceive a baby due to having problems in my uterus ... But the wife of my husband’s brother is happy because she believes that she will inherit most of the property from my father-in-law if I am unable to produce a baby. (Poonam)

Sita, who had contracted HIV, had married a man who was unaware of her health condition. Her husband had attempted to leave her after she revealed her HIV status, indicating the precarious nature of their relationship:

I fell in love with him [my husband] and had a sexual relationship before our marriage by which I became pregnant. At that time I had not told him that I had HIV. One day it slipped out of my mouth that I had HIV ... after that he attempted to run away from my life. (Sita)

Sanu worked as an advocate for an anti-trafficking NGO run by formerly trafficked women. Consequently, her husband and his family were aware of her trafficking history. Although she was involved in community awareness programs aimed at preventing discrimination against returnee women, she herself was subjected to discriminatory practices by her family:

These days, the money from my labour is accepted to support our family but I am not accepted ... This means that the money from my work can buy incense sticks for God to be offered from my family, but I am not allowed to offer or light the incense sticks from my own hands to our family deity. (Sanu)

For Sanu, this type of treatment was especially hurtful because it reinforced the message that she was inferior in the eyes of God. Accordingly, even the returnees who had fulfilled their desire to marry continued to struggle with ongoing discrimination, exclusion and rejection, as well as the day to day stress associated with keeping their past a secret.

Overall, the data suggests that the returnee women faced multiple challenges and further hardship after they left their families and moved to Kathmandu. Sexual exploitation, difficulties in finding adequately paid work, and a lack of family support were commonly reported experiences. Some returnees lived in constant fear because they were threatened or continually harassed by their traffickers or their associates. While four women eventually found a husband, these returnees feared further discrimination and rejection if their husbands or their husband’s families discovered their sex trafficking background. Nonetheless, many of the women who moved to Kathmandu also
demonstrated resilience and an appreciation of their newfound autonomy. These factors are discussed below in terms of how they assisted the returnees to rebuild their lives.

6.3.5. Newfound autonomy and resilience

Notwithstanding the challenges faced by the returnees who moved to Kathmandu, many of them demonstrated the will to survive, despite their economically and socially precarious living circumstances. For Rama, this resilience appeared to be fostered by her experience of multiple hardships in her past and present life and her fatalistic approach to life. In addition, she reminded herself that her current impoverished situation was ‘far better’ than forced sex work in the brothel in India:

I am used to my life and its hardships. I have never had a good life so how can I expect my life would be better in the future and in my older age? I did not even enjoy my young age! Therefore physical comfort seems an unachievable goal in my life. I do not have a place to take shelter. I do not even have any other means to feel content in my life and this is the reality of my life ... but I feel far better living in Nepal instead of being a wife of thousands of men. (Rama)

Rama’s resilience appeared to be bolstered by her philosophical outlook on life. In contrast, Smiriti reported that having secure employment and economic independence elevated her sense of self-worth:

I have a good job as a teacher by which I am sustaining my living on my own. So I have to feel good. (Smiriti)

All eight women who moved to Kathmandu eventually found work. Living independently in Kathmandu also enabled them to exercise more autonomy in their day to day lives. In contrast to the returnees living in the villages, these women enjoyed relatively more privacy and freedom and exercised greater control over what personal information they made available to others. Ambika, for example, described how she was relieved to be working in a place where no one knew about her past:

I haven’t told my trafficking incident to any other people who live around me. Now, I work in the hospital, so they [her co-worker and neighbours] think that I might have a good background. (Ambika)
Pramila similarly managed to hide her trafficking background and her HIV status from her rooming partners. She had established that her roommates were preoccupied with their own lives and work, which in turn worked in her favour as they showed minimal interest in her affairs:

*I am confident that my roommates will never know about me because I do not tell anybody about my condition and they do not have the habit of talking about other people. They all are so busy with their work so they do not have time to be concerned about other’s matters.*

(Pramila)

It further emerged that living independently offered some women the opportunity to find a marriage partner without family assistance. This allowed them to exercise greater control over how they presented themselves to others, and to make their own decisions. Poonam had been subjected to several adverse life events including rape, sex trafficking and an abusive marriage. Her previous marriage had been arranged and decided by her parents. After moving to Kathmandu she was able to exercise control over how much information she disclosed about herself to her new husband:

*My husband proposed to me and I accepted his proposal. At that time I perceived this as an opportunity. It had been difficult for me to live in Kathmandu as a single person but at the same time I was determined to not tell him about my previous life for the goodness of our marital life.*

A few women also reported that their situations improved with the passage of time. Sila was married and had a daughter at the time of interview. She and her husband ran a shop which provided them with an income adequate for their needs. Being married and operating a successful business improved Sila’s standing in her family’s eyes:

*The way the family treated me has definitely changed. Before, when I went to my sister-in-law’s place, I would have to sit on the bare floor but now she gives me a cushion to sit on. She even says ‘basnus’ [a respectful term for ‘sit down’] while before she would say ‘bas’ [a derogatory or familiar term for ‘sit down’] ... Now she even asks me if she can bring me a drink. Things have become different.*

(Sila)

In summary, the women who moved to Kathmandu appeared to be able to exercise more control and autonomy over their lives compared to their counterparts living in the villages. At the same time they faced different challenges that arose from their lack of social and family support. The next
section explores the accounts of those women who were residing in accommodation provided by NGOs after moving to Kathmandu.

6.4. Life in the NGO

In Nepal, a significant number of formerly trafficked women who are rejected by their families or do not want to return home end up living in residential accommodation provided by NGOs (Evans & Bhattarai 2000, pp. 28-29). Similarly in this study, at the time of interview seven returnees were living in accommodation provided by anti-trafficking NGOs. The women’s accommodation was provided free of charge along with meals and basic health care. The length of time the women had been residing in their respective NGOs ranged from ten months to seven years and some expressed a desire to remain there. All of the returnees had the opportunity to participate in skills training programs run by the NGOs. However, most of them were not confident in their ability to find outside employment or to live independently. As a result, they expressed anxiety about their future because they did not know if they would be able to continue to reside indefinitely in the NGOs. These returnees’ experiences are presented in terms of three themes: the perceived benefits associated with institutional living; the women’s limited prospects of returning to their families; and their increased dependency on the NGOs and uncertainty about the future.

6.4.1. The benefits associated with institutional living

All the returnees residing in NGOs reported a range of benefits associated with institutional living which they believed would not be available to them if they were living independently. Deepika, who was trafficked by her husband with her young son, explained how the NGO not only provided for all her needs but also offered her paid employment as a kitchen hand:

*I do not have to pay for food and shelter living in this NGO … I used to get 3500 rupees per month from the NGO for helping in its kitchen … I know living outside the NGO would cost a lot, which I cannot afford, but here everything I get is free.* (Deepika)

Deepika had been living in an NGO for four years and had no desire to return to her village. She nominated her son’s access to a good education and her unwillingness to engage in hard physical labour as additional reasons as to why living in an NGO was preferable to returning to her village:

*If I go back to my house, I have to work hard in the field and I would have to do substitute labour … Here in the NGO my son is receiving a good education in a private school. We have few good schools in my village and the fee there is unaffordable.* (Deepika)
Sushila reported that the income generated by her work at an NGO was an important consideration in her decision to remain living there. Interestingly, she went on to describe how her status as a returnee woman provided her with benefits which were not available to the other women in her village:

*I help in the kitchen, for which I receive 4000 rupees per month. Last time when I went to visit my family in my village, my neighbour asked me how their daughter or sister could stay in the NGO where I lived, and get involved in a paid job like mine. I said to them: ‘Only girls like us [returnee women] can stay in our organisation’. (Sushila)*

Access to medical treatment was another cited benefit associated with institutional living. Malati, whose story is presented in detail in the following chapter, had resided in an NGO for approximately seven years since leaving her village. Being HIV positive, she was grateful for the free medical treatment she received from the NGO:

*We are really appreciative that we do not need to pay money for our medicine and for our health check-ups. (Malati)*

Chameli, who was also living with HIV, similarly nominated access to medication as a chief benefit associated with living in an NGO. In addition, she perceived that the NGO was a place of safety where she did not have to account for her actions or explain her treatment regime to others. As mentioned earlier, all four women who were HIV positive had hidden their infection from their families and residing in supported accommodation away from home lessened the potential for others to learn of their condition:

*Here [in the NGO] the environment is different ... but if I go back to my home where should I hide these medicines? If people ask me why are you taking regular medicine, how could I reply to them? These are the reasons I like living in the NGO. (Chameli)*

Nayanshi, a nineteen year old woman, had been living in an NGO for three years after community pressure was placed on her parents to reject her. One of the chief benefits she associated with institutional living was her access to education, which she saw as opening up work options and ensuring her economic independence:
Being away from my home and community for so many days, the villagers gossiped about me on my return; my friends were no longer friends and they seriously put pressure on my parents to cast me out. Since then, I am living in this NGO ... I am studying at the moment and hoping to be independent in the future. (Nayanshi)

However, while the returnees clearly appreciated the support of the NGOs, they also realised that it was highly unlikely that they could ever return home to their families. In addition, the returnees residing in NGOs were segregated from mainstream Nepalese society and it is questionable whether their reintegration into the local socio-economic environment could be regarded as successful when they experienced ongoing exclusion from family and community. These issues are explored below.

6.4.2. Ongoing exclusion from family and community

The women residing in NGOs believed they had little or no prospect of returning to live with their families in their respective villages. Malati and Nayanshi had both been residing in their respective NGOs for a number of years. After moving to Kathmandu, they had not visited their families and their families had not visited them. Due to this lack of contact over an extended period of time, they believed that they would never be able to return to their families. Similarly, Maya reported having no contact with her family, despite the fact that her brothers were living close by in Kathmandu:

*My brothers and their families live in Kathmandu which is not very far from this organisation but they have never come here to visit me.* (Maya)

Sushila had been living in an NGO for four years. Although her parents allowed her to visit them and to stay with them for a few days during festive events, the other members of her family continued to exclude her from family events. For example, she described how her brother would not let her attend his wedding, which signalled to Sushila that she had no hope of being accepted by her family and returning to live with them in the future:

*My brother’s wedding was held a few months ago in the village. He invited lots of people, even my cousin’s sister who was here in Kathmandu but he did not invite me!* (Sushila)

Chameli had been living in an NGO for the last two years and, being HIV positive, she believed that she would not live for long. As she commented during the interview: ‘*I could die at any time*’. Due to her poor health, she believed she would be an additional burden for her family if she returned
home. She also cited her dependence on the NGO for her medical treatment as another reason why it would be impossible for her to ever return home:

*I thought that my stay would add a burden to my brothers if I returned home ... my brothers have their own children and family to look after ... The other factor was I have HIV which I did not share with my family [and] I rely on the NGO for medicine for my HIV.* (Chameli)

Sunita had been living in an NGO for three years. Both her parents had passed away when she was young. As discussed earlier in Chapter Five, she had been trafficked by a friend of her husband and after returning to Nepal presumed that her husband would have remarried. This information was actually confirmed by the NGO who established that her husband and his family had sold their property and moved elsewhere. In this context, it was impossible for Sunita to contemplate returning home.

It is noteworthy that all seven returnees residing in NGOs at the time of interview perceived that it was highly unlikely or impossible for them to ever return to their families. These women’s accounts illuminate not only their ongoing exclusion from family and community, but also signal their dependency on the NGOs for their ongoing livelihood and the precarious nature of their current living situations. These issues are canvassed in the following section.

6.4.3. Dependency on NGO support

For most of the women residing in NGOs, economic self-sufficiency had been their ultimate goal after moving to Kathmandu. They believed that this would ensure their ongoing livelihood and perhaps even improve their prospects of eventually being accepted by their families. However, none of the women reported that they were confident of finding sustainable employment if they were to leave the NGOs.

Nayanshi had anticipated that if she gained a good education and a job she would be financially independent which would also enhance her marital prospects and her chances of reunification with her family. However, at the time of interview she expressed doubts about whether her future goals were obtainable:

*I would like to stand on my own feet by becoming an independent woman. I think to become independent, having an education and a job is important. If I enhance my education and find a good job, a man from my caste and community would marry me. If I find a job my family...*
would accept me ... but I am not sure when all these things will happen in my life.
(Nayanshi)

All of the women residing in NGOs reported that they had attended various in-house training programs such as sewing, candle making and cooking. However, none of the returnees felt competent to be employed in the field in which they were trained. Sunita provided a list of the training activities in which she had participated. Her current job, however, did not match the training which she had completed:

*The senior staff member of the NGO first sent me for beauty parlour training, which was for six months. After that she sent me for cooking training. Then I was sent for announcing and anchoring training. When I attempted to hold a mike on the stage, I trembled; therefore that training did not suit me. Finally, I was sent to bead necklace-making training, but now she has put me in a job in this office as an office helper.* (Sunita)

Despite taking four different courses, none of them resulted in Sunita obtaining employment outside of the NGO where she resided. Deepika’s experience of the training programs run by the NGOs was similar to that of Sunita. Although she was eventually offered work as a waitress in a hotel, she was not able to continue in the position due to her lack of English. She eventually returned to work as a kitchen hand in the NGO:

*First I was sent to the training hall of this NGO to learn the beads work ... then I was sent to plant nursery training for a month ... After that I was sent for waitress training in a hotel for six months ... There I was offered a job but due to being uneducated I was unable to continue that job. Because to work there, we need to understand basic English ... After that I was sent to work in a school where I had to wash dishes and shower the children. Sometimes I was also asked to clean the school area ... The work over there was very hard. After that I came back to this organisation ... now I help here in the kitchen for which I get paid.* (Deepika)

These women’s accounts suggest that the training they received was not appropriate to their needs nor adequately targeted to the needs of employers. As indicated earlier in Chapter Four, vocational training provided by anti-trafficking organisations which focuses on women’s traditional skills has been subject to critique because it is associated with poor employment outcomes (Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012; Derks 1998). Kaufman and Crawford (2011) further observe that there has been
limited research conducted on the efficacy of training programs aimed at assisting trafficking survivors enter the workforce or generate their own incomes outside the sex industry.

Notably, six of the seven returnees residing in NGOs were working in a paid capacity for these organisations doing jobs such as cleaning, office work, cooking or support work. The NGOs also covered their living expenses. However, long term dependence on the NGOs for their everyday needs appeared to hamper the women’s ability to seek alternative livelihood strategies. Of some concern was that this appeared to have undermined the returnees’ capacity and confidence to forge an independent existence outside the NGOs. In addition, some women expressed anxiety about where they would go if the NGO where they were residing terminated its support:

*My plan is to stay for some more years in this NGO but sometimes I get afraid thinking where I could I go if madam [the director] asked me to leave her NGO.* (Sunita)

While it is apparent that the women appreciated the assistance provided by the NGOs, especially in relation to providing shelter, medical support and jobs, these activities had not necessarily assisted the women to reintegrate into the community or enhanced their economic independence. A further concern was they remained dependent on the goodwill and continued existence of these organisations.

6.5. **Chapter summary and conclusion**

The findings reported in this chapter suggest that all of the returnees, regardless of whether they were living with their families, residing independently in Kathmandu, or accommodated by NGOs, encountered numerous obstacles to reintegration. For these women, reintegration was an ongoing process that entailed continual new challenges shaped by their particular circumstances, such as health status, marriageability, geographical location, level of family support and access to employment.

The women who were living with their families in village settings were subjected to various forms of abuse and restrictions in their ongoing lives. They were considered as ‘impure’ and consequently devalued as a result of dominant cultural beliefs about desirable qualities in women, namely sexual purity. Their previous involvement in sex work damaged both their own and their family’s reputation, which Poudel (2009, p. 183) points out cannot be ‘regained’. As a result, a commonly cited challenge was the difficulty in finding a husband. Because of their limited marriage prospects, most of these returnees married poor or older men who had no or very little land and poor job
prospects. For these women, contending with day-to-day poverty was an additional challenge which, for some, was compounded by their poor health. Marriage also posed new challenges. Many of the returnees described being barred from performing certain cultural and religious rites. In addition, they were commonly subjected to further abuse or harassment by their husband’s family or the local villagers. Despite these challenges, having the status of wife, a supportive family, and a capacity for silently enduring prejudicial treatment appeared to be the main factors that assisted these women’s reintegration.

In contrast, the returnees who left their families and moved to Kathmandu faced a different set of challenges, notably finding affordable accommodation and employment. Being unaccompanied women, these returnees were also at risk of further sexual exploitation. Some also feared retaliation by their traffickers. These returnees demonstrated considerable resilience in the face of these numerous obstacles and challenges. Despite these difficulties, the women living independently perceived some advantages associated with city living and being away from their families and communities. In particular, they were able to exercise more autonomy in their day to day lives and were able to hide their trafficking backgrounds more successfully than the married women residing in the villages. As a result, they were not subject to the same level of ridicule or discrimination that their counterparts in the villages faced. Some of these women eventually married and their financial situation improved. However, these returnees also had to contend with the ongoing challenge of limited family and social support.

The women residing in supported accommodation provided by NGOs were appreciative of the assistance provided by these organisations and, at least in the short term, were assured of having their basic needs for food, shelter and medical treatment met. However, for most of these returnees, their ultimate goal of economic independence was unrealised. Some expressed anxiety about their ongoing survival if the NGO, for whatever reason, terminated its support for them. Although six of the seven returnees were working in paid positions at their respective NGOs, this also signalled their dependency on the NGOs. None of the women felt confident that the training they received while in residence would equip them to obtain outside employment. In this context, it is debatable whether the NGOs were assisting these returnees to achieve independence or were instead promoting dependency. International donors invest significant amounts of capital in anti-trafficking initiatives aimed at rescuing trafficked women and supporting their reintegration (Asman 2009). However, there has been no systematic evaluation of the outcomes of these initiatives in Nepal and consequently little is known about their effectiveness or, more worryingly, if they are actually doing harm (Kaufman & Crawford 2011, pp. 659-662). For the returnees in this study who were
dependent on the institutional care provided by NGOs, it is difficult to make an assessment of how successful their reintegration was given their relative isolation from mainstream Nepalese society.

It is noteworthy that entrenched traditional attitudes and practices regarding property and inheritance rights in Nepal that generally favour men was a major factor that impacted the returnees’ attempts to rebuild their lives after returning home. Access to assets appeared to have been a major influence on women’s choice of livelihood strategies. The women perceived themselves as disadvantaged in many ways due to not having access to a house or land, although some secured rights to property after marriage.

In summary, the women’s accounts presented in this chapter indicate that reintegration is a complex, multi-faceted process that is ongoing and cannot be considered in isolation from broader structural factors such as property and inheritance laws, dominant cultural practices, poverty and gendered norms. Notably, many of these social and legal structures restricted the rights and opportunities available to the returnees, which in turn exacerbated the challenges they faced in rebuilding their lives.
7. Chapter Seven: The personal accounts of three trafficked women returning to Nepal

7.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the personal accounts of three returnee women now living in Nepal. In contrast to the previous findings chapters which identified common themes across cases, this chapter aims to demonstrate three women’s unique experiences of reintegration using an intersectional analysis. The three case studies were purposively selected as discussed in the methodology chapter. The case studies seek to trace three women’s different experiences of reintegration, which led to the women each living in a different setting at the time of interview: Malati lived in a rehabilitation centre; Kamala lived with her husband in her village community of origin; and Smiriti lived independently from her family.

Case studies allow for an in-depth understanding of lived experiences via focusing attention on context and change over time (Neale, Thapa & Boyce 2006; Kumar 2008; Zucker 2009). The three women’s stories presented in this chapter represent ‘information rich cases’ (Patton 1990, p. 171) that enable an understanding of the role of personal biography as one factor in shaping each woman’s experience of reintegration. The case studies provide a reflective account of each woman’s life prior to being trafficked, her experiences in the brothel, and her life after returning to Nepal. They further demonstrate how the reintegration of the returnee women is an ongoing process which involves the interaction of a range of personal, social, cultural and economic factors. Accordingly, the findings presented in this chapter enable a more comprehensive understanding of the lives of the returnee women.

Although the generalisation of case study findings is limited to the case itself, Stake (1994, p. 243) suggests that significant learning can be gained from an individual case. In the context of this study, each woman’s account demonstrates the importance of understanding that, despite the common experience of being trafficked, the journey of reintegration is unique. Moreover, each woman’s story illustrates how the intersection of identity markers such as caste, ethnicity, age, marital status, location and religion can significantly influence the experience of reintegration. In Chapter Two, the benefits of using an intersectional approach to illuminate how Nepalese women may experience interlocking oppressions, or alternatively experience both oppression and privilege, were explored. In this chapter, an intersectional analysis is similarly used to illuminate how each woman’s experience of reintegration is shaped by the unique intersection of a range of factors.
7.2. Malati’s Story

Malati was twelve years of age when she was trafficked to India.\(^\text{17}\) Her house was located in a village in the Palpa district. She belonged to the Kumal caste, which is considered to be a marginalised group in Nepal (Jha 2004; Bennet 2005). She reported that her family was poor and that their day to day survival was very difficult because her father was unemployed and her mother worked on other people’s farms. Malati’s parents had five children. Before being trafficked for sex work she studied up to grade six and regarded herself as an intelligent student. Malati was tricked into trafficking. On the day of Falgun Purnima [Holy festival], Malati walked with her family from her home to the place where the village festival was being held. However, she did not return home. She was drugged by a family friend and taken to India by bus. Below, Malati describes what actually happened on that particular day:

\begin{quote}
We met one lady there; she was a friend of my sister, therefore everybody in my family knew her. She was with two other people, a man and a woman. She offered me some snacks. Immediately after having that food, I started feeling dizzy and confused. I remember after that I was kept in a bus. At that time I was semi-conscious but I knew that we were travelling in a bus, but was not sure about why and where we were going.
\end{quote}

Despite her confusion and dizziness, Malati felt safe travelling with a trusted woman from her own village. She nominated her young age and ignorance as major factors behind her trafficking:

\begin{quote}
At that time I was just 12 years old, so I didn’t know about trafficking or the place and country ‘Bharat ke, Nepal ke’ [what was Nepal and what was India]. I trusted those people, so I was confident that they would take me back to my house, so I didn’t ask many questions when travelling. We travelled for about three days, then we reached the brothel. After that, I realised what I was taken for and where I had come...
\end{quote}

Immediately after arriving at the brothel, Malati’s gharwali [madam] explained what her ‘job’ would be; she was told that she would have to have sex with men. Malati initially refused to become involved in sex work. Because of her resistance she was punished severely by the madam. She was denied food and the brothel owner beat her. Nevertheless, she stated that she did not lose hope and withstood the punishment as best she could. Below, Malati describes how she eventually submitted to sex work after being subjected to humiliating treatment from the hands of the brothel owner:

\begin{quote}
17At the time of interview, Malati was 26 years of age.
\end{quote}
One day they stripped me completely naked and sent me outside. At that time I was trying to hide my body with my hands, and was also attempting to come inside. Tell me, how could I go outside without having a single cloth on my body? Then I accepted that job. I also thought that no one could change what has been written in their fate. Similarly, if I was destined to be involved in such work [prostitution] how could I fight fate?

Despite these assaults at the hands of the brothel owner, Malati regarded her situation as her fate. Fatalism, specifically a belief that one has no control over one’s life circumstances, is widely adhered to in Nepal as part of the Hindu religion (Bista 1991; Solomon 2003). Consequently, Malati believed that being trafficked and forced into sex work was not preventable since it was decreed as ‘her fate.’

Malati suffered harsh conditions in the brothel. The brothel remained open for twenty four hours, seven days a week, and she was forced to continually service clients day and night. The girls working at the brothel received only one meal a day. She has just started menstruating two months before being trafficked and suffered from severe pain and heavy bleeding while working at the brothel. Due to her young age, Malati believed that she suffered more than other trafficking victims and described the experience as ‘torture’:

I think that none of the other girls had ever suffered like me. I went through a severe form of mental and physical torture. I may have had this feeling because I was very young at that time. [Sobbing]

After six months in the brothel, Malati was unexpectedly rescued by the Indian police. Her madam attempted to hide her, along with a few other underage girls inside a small toilet, but the police found them and rescued them. Below, Malati describes how she felt ‘lucky’ to escape sex work because in most cases she believed it was ‘impossible’:

The day when I was released was the happiest day of my life. I felt like I was taken out from quicksand (daldal) ... In most cases it is impossible for the girls to be released from that hell. I was lucky to be released.

Malati was taken to a shelter home for women rescued from sex work, where she was kept for six months. The women made a minor protest to the shelter management for keeping them for such a long time. Their slogan at that time was “hami Nepal jane, hami Nepal jane” [we would like to
return to our country soon]. After six months, she was handed over to a Nepalese anti-trafficking NGO in Kathmandu which worked with returnee women. The staff attempted to locate Malati’s family so that she could return home, but by that time she had forgotten the name of her village. By chance, a local shopkeeper who was from her local district, Palpa, was able to help the workers from the NGO locate her family.

Prior to leaving the rehabilitation centre, Malati underwent a blood test. Now aged fourteen, she was diagnosed as HIV positive. There is considerable stigma and discrimination surrounding HIV/AIDS in Nepal, and many people commonly associate it with prostitution (Beine 2002; Nepal & Ross 2010; Wasti, Randall, Simkhada & van Teijlingen 2011). Consequently, Malati feared that she would be ostracised by friends and family if her family found out about her HIV status. She believed that she posed no risk to her family and asked the staff of the NGO to keep her HIV status confidential and not tell her family.

> When I was in the organisation, I got an opportunity to learn more about this disease, like how it transfers to other people. In this sense, I didn’t see any risk to transfer this disease to my family ... I was afraid that my family and village might treat me differently, if they know about this.

After a few days, Malati’s father and uncle were called to the NGO to take her home. They were informed that she had been trafficked to India but the NGO did not disclose her HIV status to them. Malati reported that she was thankful to the staff for respecting her wishes.

As soon as Malati reached her home, she was surrounded by her family and villagers. There was a tradition in her village that the entire village would gather at someone’s house when a household member came back home after a long time away. She said that at that moment when she was surrounded by her family and neighbours, including her teachers from her primary school, she began to feel nervous. She reported that she felt like her family and the villagers would know what she did in the brothel. Her fears were realised when she heard some people talking about her and asking questions about her disappearance. However, over time, Malati realised that the villagers’ reactions were mixed. Most of the people in her village supported her return as they had some understanding that she was trafficked involuntarily because of her young age. Nonetheless, Malati described feeling hurt by the treatment she received from some of the villagers:

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18Malati filed a case against one of her traffickers, who was imprisoned for one year. However, by the time she returned home her trafficker had served her prison sentence and been released into the community.
The villagers treated me strangely. They didn’t come close to me. They looked at me from a distance as if I was dirty, or untouchable. I was very much hurt by such treatment from my people.

Malati reported that her parents welcomed her return. However, one of her uncles objected to her returning to the family home. Fortunately, Malati’s father challenged her uncle and defended his decision to have her live with the family:

*My uncle said that we should not allow her to enter into our house and village, but my father responded by saying ‘she is my daughter, my property; so, she is my responsibility. She will stay with us, in my house and you do not have to worry about her’.*

Malati was aware of the discrimination faced by other returnee women in Nepal, but she describes the largely positive reception she experienced as being different from the societal norm. Being a patriarchal society, women are regarded as the property of their father, brother or a husband, and decisions made by these male figures carry authority or power to control women’s lives (McCabe & Manian 2010). In this context, Malati believed that the strong support that she received from her father enabled her to resume living with her family in the community. Below, she describes how her parents broke with traditional societal norms of disgracing returnee women and instead showed gratitude to their God for sending her back:

*Our community too views negatively those women who have returned from sex work, but my parents were great, they were thankful to God for my return (dhannahaaiaies).*

Malati was interested in going back to school after returning home but this was not an option for her. She later discovered that her family had spent some money searching for her after she disappeared and so were in debt. Her father was unemployed at the time of her return which further worsened their economic condition. Subsequently, her father could not afford to pay for her education.

While living at home, Malati became increasingly concerned about her HIV infection. Malati had a good understanding of how HIV is transmitted, but realised the local community had no such understanding and would likely react negatively to someone with HIV status. Therefore she decided to conceal her HIV status:
Many people in my community were not educated. They had no knowledge on how this actually transfers to other people. So they tend to get anxious that it might transfer to other people easily. But for me, after attending a seminar in the NGO, I did not see any possibility to transfer this disease to my family. So I decided to keep this a secret, considering the social environment of my village.

However, she became afraid of her own blood and feared that if her blood came in contact with any family member they might contract HIV. Due to this fear she usually avoided working with a knife and needle, and she became more disturbed when she had her monthly period. This in turn limited her participation in household activities and heightened her anxiety. She was concerned that if she continued to live with her family long term, she could unintentionally transmit HIV to her family:

*One day my sister-in-law arrived in my room, and my needle, which had been missing for a few days, poked her leg. I was so worried at that time thinking that she definitely got HIV from that needle. I blamed myself and felt like I had committed a big crime.*

Not being able to disclose her HIV status to anyone made life difficult for Malati. Her parents urged her to consider marriage, but she kept rejecting this suggestion due to her HIV infection. She claimed instead that she wanted to remain single and make her own living. Her parents in turn interpreted her reaction to mean that she was planning to be dependent on them for the duration of her life and chastised her:

*They [parents] said ‘why don’t you like to marry? Are you thinking of staying with us forever? You do nothing and do not even listen to us.’*

Gender norms in Nepal expect girls to contribute to household and agricultural work, and to marry and move to their husband’s house after marriage (Joshi 2000; World Trade Press 2012). But after returning home, Malati’s physical condition started to deteriorate, which in turn limited her ability to engage in hard physical labour. Malati observed her mother’s increasing dissatisfaction with her as she continually compared her to other girls who made significant contributions to their family’s household and farming work. She was also blamed by her mother for worsening their economic situation. She recalled her mother saying:

*We spent so much money in searching for this girl but now she does nothing; we are in debt due to the money we spent in finding her.*
Being unable to work according to the expectations of her family and community, Malati too started viewing herself as a burden to her family. While she believed that returnee women still have the potential to live a normal life in Nepal, she commented that having HIV/AIDs has added more complications to her life and significantly reduced this likelihood:

*If I did not have this disease, my life would not have been different than any other normal woman.*

After a few years, Malati realised her health was severely deteriorating and that she was not able to participate actively in family and community life. Living with her family and not being able to work made her feel worthless. Malati also thought that if her health became worse, there would be a greater chance for her family and community to discover her HIV status. People living with HIV/AIDS are believed to be at increased risk of suicide (Hawton & Van Heeringen 2009), and Malati similarly indicated that she had contemplated ending her own life while she was still capable of doing so:

*In those days I was thinking of committing suicide. I thought that my life is now completely useless due to being HIV positive. I started thinking that it would be more difficult for me and my family when I reached the last stage, so I had thought of committing suicide before facing the critical condition.*

By this time Malati had been back living at home for four years. One day, she heard a radio program reporting new treatments for HIV positive people. Hearing this information gave Malati some hope for her future, which was further buoyed after a health worker came to her village to provide education on HIV/AIDS and anti-retroviral treatment (ART). Malati was keenly interested and asked many questions. She disclosed her HIV positive status to the health worker, who provided her with an address for an NGO which supports women with HIV/AIDS. He suggested that she travel to Kathmandu to have further medical tests.

Inability to fulfil her family’s expectations of her and a hope to live longer encouraged Malati to leave her family and move to Kathmandu when she was 18 years of age:

... (while) living with family, my mother frequently asked me to marry or to involve actively in household work. As my health had deteriorated due to HIV I was unable to fulfil their expectations ... therefore I left my family and came to NGO with the hope of living longer.
She approached the NGO nominated by the health worker, which accommodated her in their hostel and sent her to the hospital for a medical assessment. As a result of this assessment, she was referred for a course of anti-retroviral treatment.

Although she was not sure how long she had to live, Malati returned to school. She also obtained work in the hostel looking after other residents who were living with AIDs. She enjoyed this work and commented that it is ‘far better than being an agricultural labourer in my village’.

Malati, aged 26 at the time of interview, decided that she would not return to her family in the village. She reported that she intended to remain connected with the NGO and to continue living in Kathmandu so that she would have ready access to antiretroviral therapy. In contrast to Malati’s previous suicidal thoughts and HIV related anxiety, her experience of finding medical treatment and having meaningful work appeared to improve her psychological wellbeing. She believed that her new job, which required her to focus on the care of people living with HIV/AIDS, had provided her with a different perspective on life. She was now more focused on her new work role rather than worrying about her own uncertain future:

Because of having a busy schedule here in the organisation, sometimes I do not even remember that I am near to my death.

At the end of the interview, Malati disclosed that she was uncertain about her future. On one hand, she was not confident about how long she would be supported by the NGO and, on the other hand, she did not welcome the prospect of living indefinitely at the hostel. Despite these dilemmas, she still expressed a desire to find a husband, and believed that a man with HIV/AIDS would be a ‘perfect match’ for her due to her health condition:

In my situation, I think it is important to have a life partner ... So, I wish to have someone in my life. Some HIV positive men have proposed to me. I know they are the perfect match for my health condition, but I have not met one yet who I can share my feelings with.

While Malati expressed hope in finding a marriage partner, at the same time she believes that her HIV status has been a significant factor in preventing her from being able to live a ‘normal life’. She commented that she had seen many returnee women ‘living a normal life after returning to Nepal.’ However, in terms of her own experience, Malati reflected that ‘being a returnee with HIV is a double burden; it has added more pain in my life’. 
7.2.1. Discussion of Malati’s case

Malati’s story illustrates how the complex intersection of factors such as age, caste, HIV status, economic situation, community expectations and socially endorsed gender roles has shaped her experience of reintegration. In addition, her story illustrates how mediating factors such as the exercise of patriarchal authority and access to health care and information has equally influenced her life course.

Societal norms in Nepal surrounding the ‘chastity’ of women have led to the widely held perception that trafficked women are somehow ‘degraded’ or ‘spoiled’ (Joshi 2001; Richardson et al. 2010). As a result, formerly trafficked women are often labelled as ‘bad’ and rejected by their families (Laurie & Richardson 2011). However, in Malati’s case, this perception was tempered by her young age at the time she was trafficked. Societal thinking surrounding the comparative ‘innocence’ or ‘culpability’ of women in the circumstances of being trafficked seemed to have a bearing on community attitudes to Malati’s situation. The general thinking of the people in her community was that a twelve year old girl would never give her consent to be trafficked for sex work. Thus, her young age at the time of her trafficking was a significant factor in Malati’s overall acceptance by her family and community.

In addition, it was well known in Malati’s community that she had been taken to India by deceptive means. This further enhanced Malati receiving understanding and acceptance from both family and community. Interestingly, for reasons unknown, it seems that neither Malati’s family members nor community members expressed any concern that she may have contracted HIV while working in a brothel. Since this topic was perhaps ‘taboo,’ or little understood, Malati found herself in the situation of being accepted back into her community, wishing to resume her position of dutiful daughter, yet privately having to conceal the physical and psychological difficulties that prevented her from fulfilling female gender role expectations.

The strong patriarchal system in Nepalese society also contributed to Malati’s acceptance in her family and community. It appears that Malati’s father, as the dominant male in the family, played an influential role in Malati’s acceptance by both family and community. While his strong stance against a male relative’s attempts to degrade Malati protected her, this stance was based on his perceived ‘ownership’ of her. Notably, acting on his power to protect his daughter reinforces the societal norm that a father has ownership of and authority over a daughter.
While residing with her family, Malati was seen to fail to comply with Nepalese societal gender roles by rejecting marriage. Her poor health also compromised her ability to carry out ‘female’ tasks of field and household work. Malati faced the difficulty of not feeling able to disclose her HIV status for fear of family and community rejection. In Nepal, there is no doubt that there are many misconceptions about HIV and discrimination against those people who are infected with this disease is prevalent (Aryal, Regmi, & Mudwari 2012). Certainly Malati thought it best to conceal her HIV infection, even though the factors which eventually made living with her family difficult were all related to being HIV positive: concealing her infection; having to constantly resist her parents’ pressure to get married; and her inability to carry out everyday household tasks due to her poor health. Given these issues, it is not surprising that Malati believed that living with HIV was more difficult than having the status of a returnee woman.

Lack of health resources in rural areas of Nepal is a further structural factor that influenced Malati’s experience of reintegration. It appears there was no health resource in Malati’s village where she could gain information about HIV. Health facilities in rural Nepal are poor (Baral, Lyons, Skinner, Edwin & van Teijlingen 2012; Wasti et al. 2012); if such a resource had been available, Malati may have been able to gain information and treatment while continuing to reside in her village. In Malati’s case, a chance encounter with a health worker was a significant factor that changed her life and gave her hope for her future. However, this was at the cost of moving away from her family and community, when social custom in Nepal still dictates that women should not live alone (Luitel 2001).

After moving to Kathmandu, Malati was able to assume a range of ‘identities’ other than ‘daughter’ and ‘family worker’. She was a paid worker, mentor to others, and student. Additionally she was able to assume more control over her own health. Nevertheless, Malati continued to want to conform to the dominant societal expectation of marriage for Nepalese women (Bhadra & Shah 2007). Importantly, marriage offers Nepalese women respectability and access to household and property (Acharya, Mathema & Acharya 1999). In Malati’s case, she expressed a desire to find a marriage partner also infected with HIV which, while limiting the potential pool of marriage partners, was also seen as a way of managing her condition.

In conclusion, family and community reintegration for Malati is a complex and uneven process that is shaped by her ability to conform to dominant societal expectations as well as the opportunities presented that allow her to carve out new roles for herself. Malati was able to live with her family for four years but was unable to work and marry as expected by her parents. She was able to gain
important health information and make the choice to move to Kathmandu and gain new experiences as a paid worker and student. However, at the time of interview, Malati was uncertain about her future. She was unsure whether the NGO that supported her would have enough funds to guarantee long term shelter, medicine and employment. For Malati, reintegration appears to be an ongoing process that can involve unpredictable life changes that present both opportunities and difficulties.

7.3. Kamala’s story

Kamala belongs to the Chhetri caste which is considered to be a high caste in Nepal. She is originally from the Shikharbesi village of the Nuwakot District, which is one of the most prominent districts of girl trafficking in Nepal (Khanal 2011; Lamichhane 2012). Her parents had little land and a big family which comprised six children: four daughters and two sons. Her parent’s occupation was subsistence farming. Her brothers were sent to primary school, but Kamala and her sisters were not sent to school. She mentioned that in her caste and community, parents did not like to invest money in educating daughters. Girls were expected to contribute to household chores, farming and field work, and then move to their husband’s house through marriage at a young age. When Kamala was fifteen her parents arranged her wedding to an older man from the same village. The man was relatively wealthy, which was the main priority for Kamala’s parents and so they did not consider his age. Below, Kamala describes her life after her marriage:

I was so young those days. I was so scared of that man [her husband] that I always tried to avoid his presence. For example, if I saw him inside the room, I used to find reasons to go outside and if I saw him outside, I tried to hide myself inside the house. I felt like he would chew me or swallow me alive. (salakka nilcha jasto lagthayo).

Kamala continually struggled to accept her life with her older husband for three years despite her dislike for him. She informed her mother several times that she wanted to come back home, but her mother persuaded her to stay with him. However, when Kamala turned eighteen, she told her parents that she was never returning to her husband’s house and resumed living with her family. She described how her parents physically assaulted her as a result of her perceived failure to adhere to expected gender and cultural norms:

Actually, I was not happy living in my mother’s house either, because they always pressured me to go back to my husband’s house. Because of my decision, I usually got lots of punishment from my parents. Once I was even kicked down from the balcony and got injuries.
While Kamala had found life difficult living with her husband, it was equally challenging living with her family where she had no access to money and struggled to acquire basic necessities such as clothing. One day, she came in contact with a Tamang caste man from her nearby village. He convinced her that he could rescue her from her difficult family situation if she agreed to go with him to take up a job in Kathmandu. As Kamala felt she had limited options living with her family, she immediately decided to go with him.

Kamala was taken to a brothel in Calcutta. In the brothel, her madam explained about her new ‘job’, and informed her that she would be released from the brothel after finishing her contract:

_There, the female brothel owner who was of Nepalese origin told me that I was contracted to do sex work for three years in her brothel, so I could not leave or escape from the brothel until my contract was finished. From the day I started doing that job, I held onto the hope that I would be released from the brothel after three years. When I was in the brothel, most of the time I spent cursing my trafficker._

Kamala described feeling ‘trapped’ and ‘helpless’. She recalled feeling constantly angry with her trafficker who broke her trust and sold her into prostitution, but also clung to the hope of being released after three years. The conditions in the brothel were very harsh. Kamala had to work long hours. She reported receiving poor food and living in unsanitary conditions which resulted in her being frequently sick and suffering from ‘pet dukhne’ [lower abdominal cramps]. Kamala’s experience is consistent with previous research on the experiences of trafficked women working in Indian brothels who reported that they were provided with limited food and forced to work long hours (KC et al. 2001).

On one occasion, Kamala became severely sick and was admitted to hospital. She described feeling ‘really worried that I might die soon before seeing my father and mother’, which fuelled her determination to see her parents again. By that time, she had finished her three year contract and had managed to gain the trust of the brothel owner. She told her ‘madam’ that she would like to visit her parents in Nepal for a few days. In order to persuade the brothel owner to let her go, Kamala also offered to bring back some new girls from her village. The brothel owner agreed to this plan and gave Kamala 3000 Indian rupees and some gold jewellery, while also arranging for someone to accompany her to Nepal.
On her way to Nepal, Kamala started to worry about how she might be received by her parents, especially since she had left home without informing them. She was anxious about how she would answer the questions that her parents and the villagers were likely to ask about her absence, and what she did while she was away. Kamala returned to her village on her own. Below she describes the feeling of shame she experienced on returning home for the first time after her trafficking experience:

*I did not have courage to see them [her family] face to face. So I didn’t enter the house in day time because of feeling ashamed; I waited until it was dark and then I entered home.*

As soon as her parents saw Kamala, they cried and told her how worried they had been after her disappearance. She was told that after she disappeared, her siblings searched for her, as well as the ‘fakaune manche’ (the person who lured her). Hearing this made Kamala realise that her family cared more about her than she had originally believed.

Although Kamala was worried about how she would be received by her family and the villagers, one factor that facilitated her initial acceptance was that she had returned home at the time of paddy harvesting. At this time her family was in need of more hands to harvest their annual crop, so Kamala was sent to the field the next day after her return. While working in the field, many neighbours and friends working alongside her began asking where she had been for so many years:

*What could I say at that time? It’s like our proverb ‘kina chauris marich, afnai ragale’ [a pepper seed has so many wrinkles due to its own smoky taste]. My situation at that time was the same as a pepper seed. I got involved in such a shameful act so how could I answer those people and tell them why I escaped and what I did over there?... So I remained quiet.*

According to Kamala, it was common knowledge in the village that she had been trafficked to India. She decided not to respond to any of the negative comments made by the villagers and later realised that this strategy helped to defuse people’s initial suspicions. However, she received a mixed reaction from her immediate and extended family. While some relatives were supportive, others were hostile towards her. She was badly hurt when her brother-in-law made disparaging comments about her character, implying that she was still involved in sex work:

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19Kamala’s parents filed a complaint against her trafficker, who was convicted and sent to prison for ten years.
Once, my bhinaju [husband of her sister] rudely said that ‘You might get pregnant while staying in your mum’s house.’... He used offensive language while talking with me. After that argument, we didn’t have such a good relationship for a year.

In Nepalese culture sex and sexuality are not generally openly discussed (Wasti et al. 2011). Consequently, when Kamala’s brother-in-law insinuated that she was involved in prostitution, she felt immensely humiliated by him. Faced with this type of humiliation from relatives and the local villagers, Kamala contemplated going back to India, rather than continuing to live in the village:

After going to India, I lost my reputation. I couldn’t make much money and on coming home I was humiliated by my own people, so I had thoughts of going back to the brothel instead of bearing humiliation from my own people.

Nevertheless, despite her humiliating treatment, Kamala’s father continued to support her and expressed his desire for her to have a new start in life:

My father said to me that I was lucky because I was able to come back safely from such a place. He said it is great that I didn’t die over there, so I need to have a good start in a new life back in the village.

The positive reaction she received from her father and his suggestion that she could start a new life appeared to be major factors that stopped Kamala from going back to the brothel. Similar to Malati, receiving support from her father was a crucial factor that enabled Kamala to regain a foothold in family and community life. This is because under the Nepalese patriarchal system, women derive their status from male family members (Luitel 2001). Kamala therefore resumed working in the field and was able to renew her friendships with old friends. However, despite some improvement in her social standing in the village, she commented that during the two years that she stayed with her family, daily life involved extremely hard work: ‘it is a bitter truth that I was asked to work hard there’.

In the meantime, Kamala met a man from a nearby village and fell in love with him. Although family elders are traditionally responsible for finding suitable marriage partners for their sons and daughters, the couple decided to marry. While welcoming marriage, Kamala soon faced a new threat. Her parents-in-law were hostile and abusive towards her. Violence against women, particularly from in-laws and husbands, is a common practice in Nepal that has gained social
acceptance (Aryal, Regmi & Mudwari 2012, p. 122). In Kamala’s case, being formerly married and also having been trafficked for sex work gave her in-laws greater socially sanctioned ‘permission’ to abuse her. Below, she describes the demeaning treatment she received from her mother-in-law:

You know, my mother-in-law once spat at me, and talked so rudely to me saying I had once been to such a place [the brothel] so I was not even allowed to touch her. Wasn’t she so cruel?

The neighbours and villagers close to her husband’s house made further accusations against Kamala, saying that she had trapped a young and innocent ‘boy’ [her husband] for her own benefit, so that she could live a respectable life. At the time of interview, Kamala and her husband had been married for eleven years and Kamala was approximately 35 years old. They both worked full time doing farming work, by which they were able to save some money to build a new home and buy some farm land. However, Kamala’s neighbours criticised her acquisition of property, claiming that it was paid for from her previous sex work. Below, Kamala describes how this accusation fuelled her desire to see her neighbours punished for their constant belittling of her:

They [my neighbours] are all criticising me saying that I am puffed-up [umleko] by the money that I brought from the brothel. These days I am working so hard to make our life better. I don’t have any of the money left that I brought from the brothel. So, I would like somebody to punish them in order to bring them back on the right track.

After the death of her parents-in-law, in accordance with local custom, Kamala had to take on more family and community responsibilities included arranging puja [ritual offerings], organising family gatherings, and offering family gifts and money. Being a returnee woman yet being in a position to undertake these culturally significant roles and tasks made Kamala feel included in her family and the local community. At the same time, they placed extra financial demands on Kamala and her husband:

I continuously work hard but I never have a comfortable life ... If a calf sees his mother is weak or feeble, does he realise he should give up breast milk? The answer is no. Likewise, our condition is not so good but our relatives expect lots [gifts and money] from us.

Kamala indicated that she was not sure of her exact age.
At the time of the interview, Kamala was experiencing gynaecological problems and was unable to conceive a child. She believed that her inability to fall pregnant was related to her previous work in the brothel. Due to having limited access to medical care in her village, Kamala and her husband had travelled to Kathmandu for medical treatment the previous year. They sold two goats to pay for her treatment, but the treatment failed. Nepalese women are expected to bear children and are considered unworthy if they remain childless (Luitel 2001). Consequently, Kamala felt she had failed in her duty as a wife and believed that her husband was likely to take a second wife:

This is my main worry at this moment ... he wants to have a baby but I am not able to conceive a baby ... the only solution in our case is his second marriage.

Kamala was also distressed by the reactions of some of the villagers, who kept reminding her husband about her sex work background and were encouraging him to marry another woman. Although polygamy has been illegal since 1963 in Nepal, many men take additional wives if their first wife fails to produce a son (Wydra et al. 2010).

Kamala described how the villagers referred to her as a ‘bombaywali’, which is a derogatory term used to refer to women who previously worked as sex workers in India. Kamala was concerned that many years after returning to Nepal, she and the other returnee women continue to be stigmatised by this label.

7.3.1. Discussion of Kamala’s case

Kamala’s case study is instructive because it illustrates an experience of returning independently to Nepal without the involvement of any anti-trafficking organisation. In addition it illustrates how the process of reintegration back into village life is ongoing and changeable. Similar to Malati, factors such as caste and societal attitudes to women and sexuality interacted with personal factors such as health and marriage choices to shape Kamala’s experiences. The interaction between these individual and institutional factors is explored below.

The practice of higher caste Hindus of marrying daughters at a young age to a well-off older man was a precipitating factor in Kamala’s trafficking. Her aversion to her husband prompted her to leave him, which in turn not only made her vulnerable to trafficking, but also shaped her experience of return. Having left her husband she did not have any home or authorised property to which she
could return to after leaving the brothel. At the same time, she was apprehensive about returning to her parents’ home because she had not informed anyone about her decision to leave the village.

Bennett (1983) observes that higher caste women who are trafficked after marriage are highly likely to be rejected in Nepalese society. Nonetheless, Kamala was not rejected outright by her family and community. She managed to gain some acceptance and continue to live in her community despite ongoing social condemnation from some individuals. Her father’s support for her along with her willingness to return immediately to farm work helped her initially to gain a measure of family and community acceptance.

Although the dominant cultural practice in Nepal is for families to arrange their daughter’s marriage, Kamala defied tradition by choosing her own marriage partner. Notably, marriage increased Kamala’s personal power through social recognition of her status as wife, having access to her husband’s property, and being able to work in partnership with her husband to increase the couple’s assets. At the same time, she was subjected to demeaning treatment by her new in-laws and the local villagers. The community’s ongoing hostility towards Kamala was evidenced by people still referring to her as a ‘bombaywali’, which suggests that her identity as a formerly trafficked woman still shapes her social relationships many years after returning to Nepal. Nonetheless, Kamala appeared to be able to maintain her marriage in the face of this attack on her character. She also demonstrated personal resilience to resist societal expectations by, firstly, marrying through choice and, secondly, coping with family and community hostility.

One of Kamala’s ongoing concerns was her inability to conceive a baby, which she believed was a consequence of her previous sex work. Infertility has been identified as a potential health complication arising from sex trafficking due to heightened risk of exposure to sexually transmitted infections (Beyrer & Stachowiak 2003). Kamala believed that there was a strong possibility that, on the basis of her infertility problems, her husband would enter into a second marriage, which for her would entail not only a potential loss of intimacy, but also loss of power and position. She also worried that this would lead to conflict in her relationship with her husband.

In Nepalese culture, once daughters are married they move to their husbands’ homes. After marriage, they are considered as only guests in their parents’ homes. However, if a woman becomes involved in unlawful sexual activity such as prostitution, she is usually denied access to her husband’s home and loses her associated rights as a wife.
Kamala’s experiences reveal the complexity of managing patriarchal and community norms and hostility in social networks in the intimate arena of village life. Her story shows that she was able to exert agency in making choices to achieve a better life in the face of restrictive social norms, but has been unable to silence local criticism. The long term impact of reproductive problems resulting from her sex trafficking continue to shape Kamala’s life course. It seems likely that Kamala will continue to face challenges in her marriage as well as challenges in being accepted in her local community.

7.4. Smiriti’s Story

Smiriti was from an urban village in the Nuwakot District. Her family comprised her parents and four children. Her parents were farmers. She reported her caste as ‘Giri’, which is considered to be upper caste in the wider Nepalese community. She described strong ties between people in her community, where most of the households shared the same caste and occupational background.

After completion of the SLC [the School Leaving Certificate], Smiriti was sent to Kathmandu for further education. She moved into a rented room with her elder brother and sister who were already living in Kathmandu. After a few months her brother went abroad for work and her sister returned to her village after finishing her study. Smiriti was then left alone in Kathmandu. She was offered a job as a painter by a woman from her village and as she had morning classes only, she accepted the job offer.

One day at work, she was introduced to some men who offered her the opportunity to join their handicraft business in India, saying that she could earn up to 35,000 rupees a week. Smiriti did not suspect anything wrong at this stage and agreed to go to India with them. Being originally from one of the trafficking prone districts, Smiriti was aware of girl trafficking in Nepal but she thought that only uneducated girls could be trafficked to India.

The next morning, Smiriti left for India with the two men and the woman from her village. After reaching India, Smiriti was taken to a building which she referred to as her first brothel, although she was not told to do sex work there. Smiriti attempted to escape, but she was caught and soon shifted to another brothel in Kashmir. There, she found out that she had been sold for 100,000 rupees. Another Nepalese girl at the brothel told Smiriti that if she tried to escape she ‘would be thrown into a deep well which was behind the brothel’. She also informed Smiriti that the local police were not trustworthy. Later, Smiriti found out that this Nepalese girl had informed the
madam that she had been plotting her escape. Consequently, the brothel staff took all of her personal belongings, including her jewellery and money.

Smiriti described being punished frequently by her madam while living in the brothel. She also experienced tiredness, dizziness and confusion, and later found out that her food had been drugged:

*I do not have a strong memory about how much I suffered in the brothel when I was kept on those drugs, but my friends later told me that I usually served more than 30 clients in a day.*

Smiriti devised ways of escaping from the brothel, such as pretending to be sick, but she reported that the madam was a ‘*cruel woman*’ who ‘*didn’t show any mercy to me*’. After two months in the brothel Smiriti pretended to be seriously ill. When she was on the way to hospital, she acted like she was going to vomit, and the two women who accompanied her allowed her to get off the rickshaw. She walked to the corner of the street and from there she ran away. Below she describes her experience of escaping the brothel:

*I once started running, I did not even turn back and see how far behind they were from me ... it was nearly dark. I passed that night hiding inside a cement drain pipe. The next morning when I was wandering on the street, I saw an organisation for disabled people, where I went and asked for help. After that I was taken to the police station. The next day, the police came to me with a Nepalese interpreter. She asked about my trafficking incident, and I was taken to a shelter home for trafficked girls.*

While living in the shelter in India, Smiriti contacted her family in Nepal, as she knew that they would be worried since her disappearance. However, at that time she did not say anything about being trafficked to India. Smiriti just told her family that she was alright and would be back soon.

Women who have been trafficked for sex work often keep their story secret, in order to avoid bringing shame to themselves and their family (Derks 1998; Hennink & Simkhada 2004). Similarly, Smiriti started planning how to account for her disappearance in a way that would not arouse her family’s suspicions that she had been involved in sex work.

*I did not want to disclose that I was trafficked for sex work to my family. I was planning to build a story in a different way by saying that I went to India for my job but I was separated from my friends in India.*
After nine days living in the Indian shelter, Smiriti was handed over to a Nepalese NGO which supported women repatriated from sex work in India. On the day Smiriti arrived in Nepal, she was stunned to find her father waiting at the NGO’s office. Her sense of powerlessness was exacerbated by the staff’s decision to disclose her trafficking experience to her father without consulting her first. Control over information is power, in the sense that people can decide what, how, when, to whom and in what manner to share information about themselves (Mayfield, Rice, Flannery & Rotheram-Borus 2008). In this context, Smiriti believed that the NGO violated her right to confidentiality by disclosing sensitive information to her family without her consent.

Smiriti was more disturbed when she was told that her father refused to take responsibility for her after the NGO staff informed him that she had been trafficked for sex work. In her eyes, returning to Nepal with the help of an anti-trafficking NGO actually served to further stigmatise her and limit her chances of family and community acceptance:

*If I had come back to Nepal by myself, without the involvement of that organisation, my image in the society would have been normal as before.*

The NGO housed women from a variety of backgrounds, and not all of them had a history of sex trafficking. However, Smiriti reported that *‘the girls from a sex trafficking background were easily identified and were viewed negatively by the other residents’*. She described how these residents often looked strangely at her and asked questions about her work in the brothel, which she found distressing.

In addition to a failure to respect her confidentiality, Smiriti experienced a lack of autonomy while living at the NGO. The staff would not let allow her to leave the organisation and she was not sure how long she would remain there. Consequently she argued with the staff in the NGO, pointing out to them that she had previously resided in Kathmandu independently:

*I even argued with the staff of the organisation saying I was very bored there, sitting down the whole day and doing nothing. Before going to India I was living alone in Kathmandu, I was working and studying, so what was the purpose of this lock up?*

Smiriti was referred for a health check-up and HIV test while residing at the NGO. Nonetheless, she was not provided with the results of any of her tests or told of her HIV status. She decided to file a case against her traffickers while living at the NGO. However, the legal procedures were time-
consuming, which in turn extended her stay at the NGO. In addition, she felt humiliated by her treatment at the police station when she heard the police talking about her, asking ‘how a well-educated girl like me could be trafficked’. This lack of validation of her trafficking experience contributed to Smiriti’s ongoing sense of powerlessness.

Smiriti was sent to compulsory classes on necklace making. However, she believed this training had little prospect of leading to employment. Furthermore, she worried that residing in the NGO for such a long time may actually harm her chances of being accepted back in her village because it would raise people’s suspicions about where she had been:

_It was all like wasting time. I also felt that as long as I was kept in the NGO, it would raise more questions among the villagers about my disappearance, and it would be more difficult to make them believe that I was not returning from the brothel._

In this regard, Smiriti’s negative account of life in the NGO mirrors the experiences of other returnee women that have been reported in the literature. For example, Frederick (2006) claims that many Nepalese women rescued from brothels in India reside in NGOs that resemble prisons with barred windows, guards and fences. Due to these restrictive conditions at the NGO, Smiriti was keen to leave. She stated: ‘I prayed for my release from that organisation’.

After a few months, Smiriti’s father came to the NGO to visit her. During his visit she pleaded with him to help secure her release. She finally convinced him to help her after promising him that she would have no contact with her family once she left the NGO:

_As I could not be released without help from my father, I cried in front of him and requested his help. I told him that I would stay away from my family and find work in Kathmandu, and would never create any problems for him and others in the family._

Her father subsequently signed the paper work which indicated that he would take responsibility for her welfare after her release. However, as soon as they left the NGO, he went back to his village, leaving Smiriti alone on the streets of Kathmandu. With the help of some friends, Smiriti obtained a job as a security guard in a shopping mall. While living independently in Kathmandu, Smiriti started drinking alcohol. She had been introduced to alcohol when living in the brothel and at the time of the interview described herself as an alcoholic.
Despite her promise not to contact her family, the following year during Dashain, [a festival] Smiriti went home without notifying her parents. Below, she describes how she was confined to the family home during her visit because her parents were worried about the shame she may bring to the family:

> Once I reached my house, they [my parents] said I should not go outside the house because they did not want our villagers to see me and make me a victim of their gossiping. So I passed most of my time inside the house. However, in my own house I was very much hurt by my uncle. He said that even a glass of water from my hand was now unacceptable for him.

Because Smiriti had received an education and was considered to be of a mature age at the time she was trafficked, both her family and the community were not convinced that she was trafficked involuntarily. Being a close-knit community, it was not long before her arrival in the village was common knowledge. Many Nepalese people assume that returnee women from India are HIV positive (Buet, Bashford & Basnyat 2012). Similarly, the local people in Smiriti’s village assumed that she was infected with HIV and pressured her family to send her away:

> They told my parents that it would not be good for their relationship if my family kept on supporting me. They also said that the returnee girls from India usually carry HIV/AIDs, so they shouldn’t give permission for such girls to stay in their village. I had expected positive responses from my educated friends and family, but they also said lots of bad things on my return.

Due to the stigma attached to sex work, Smiriti’s mother was worried that her presence in the house might reduce her sisters’ chances of marriage. Smiriti recalled a conversation with her mother, who said that ‘the neighbours were saying that from now on, no one from our village would marry any daughter from our house’. Smiriti was therefore told that she should not maintain any connection with her family after that visit. Consequently, she returned to Kathmandu after just one week. She later found that a few more months after she left, her family was forced to leave their community.

It appears that the community punished Smiriti’s family for having their returnee daughter stay with them, even for one week, by depriving them of ‘parima’ support. Parima is described as a strategy of combining forces in a system of reciprocal or exchange labour (Bishop 1990). This practice is integral to agriculture production in Nepal where a majority of the Nepalese people live in rural
areas and around 74 percent are dependent on agriculture as their occupation (Government of Nepal, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives 2010). Smiriti, described how her presence in her family home led the community to deny the family community cooperation in agricultural activities:

Because of allowing me to stay with them during Dashain, my family suffered a lot ... they were socially excluded. The entire village was against my family. They didn’t like to help or work for my family. They were excluded from community supports. My family later moved to Kathmandu due to lacking ‘parima’ support because no one person from our community was ready to help my family by offering communal labour.

After returning to Kathmandu, Smiriti found out about an NGO which had been started by survivors of sex trafficking and worked for the rights of returnee women. Being a survivor herself, she joined the NGO. This NGO considered Smiriti’s educational qualification and recruited her in paid employment as a teacher to educate women and children who were living in NGO. Smiriti was frequently asked to participate in the organisation’s anti-trafficking awareness raising programs. However, one time when she was in her home district participating in a program, she received a threatening call from one of her traffickers who was still hiding from the police. Smiriti reported that since then she lives in fear that anyone can harm her at any time and has since changed her mobile phone number:

I was sold by them and now I was back. So he threatened to kill me, and said that he would throw my body in the jungle. He also said that to do this was just nothing for them.

In addition to this fear of reprisals, Smiriti described how, four years on, she is still traumatised by the memory of her escape from the brothel: ‘I am often scared, and my head starts spinning when I remember that dreadful night which I spent inside the gutter’. For Smiriti, it would appear that her past experience of sex trafficking continues to significantly shape her day to day life and behaviour.

Smiriti believes that although her family rejected her due to community pressure, they still care for her and want to see her married. She believes that it may still be possible for her to find a marriage partner because of her relatively young age, education and employment. In addition, she describes herself as being a ‘good looking woman’. She believes that all these factors will assist her in finding a good match and pointed out that she frequently receives marriage proposals from men. However, Smiriti also reported that she was suffering from a severe infection in her uterus which she believed
was an outcome of her previous work in the brothel. As a result, she could no longer work hard and believed that this may have a negative impact on her ability to attract a marriage partner.

At the time of the interview, Smiriti reported that she still finds it difficult being totally cut off from her family. She recalled that when she was a child, she was the most loved child in her family. Below, she describes how her family’s rejection of her continues to cause her pain and grief:

*I have wished to visit them frequently as I used to before, and I want their love and affection back in my life, but after that Dashain and creating such scandal in the village, they didn’t even like to see my face.* [Crying]

7.4.1. Discussion of Smiriti’s case

Smiriti’s caste, education, and age at the time she was trafficked are pertinent intersecting factors that have shaped her experience of reintegration. After she was repatriated from India, the patriarchal authority exercised by her father was equally influential in determining Smiriti’s life path. However, in contrast to Malati and Kamala’s experiences, her father’s outright rejection of her meant that returning to the family home was not an option. Smiriti was similarly shunned by the local people in her community of origin. Significantly, she believed that her association with an anti-trafficking NGO hindered rather than assisted her to reconnect with family and community because it brought attention to bear on her identity as a formerly trafficked woman. The interconnections between these factors are discussed below.

Smiriti belonged to a high caste family who resided in a close-knit community that viewed sexually trafficked women as impure and immoral. Due to the assumption that returnee women from India usually carry HIV, Smiriti was perceived as a threat to the local community. As a result, her family were placed under considerable community pressure to reject her. The stigma attached to being trafficked for the purposes of commercial sex was felt not only by Smiriti, but also her whole family. Notably, her sisters were equally at risk of being devalued and deemed unmarriageable because of their familial link with Smiriti.

One of the most common strategies proposed to prevent girl trafficking is education (KC et al. 2001; Hennink & Simkhada 2004; Adhikari 2011). However, Smiriti’s story challenges this discourse. Being educated and older, she had assumed that she would never be trafficked for sex work. Both the police and her community also subscribed to this view, which in turn meant that Smiriti was viewed as partly responsible for her own trafficking.
It is recognised that a failure to validate experiences of sexual violence tends to promote self-blame (Herman 1997). In Smiriti’s case, this tendency may have been countered by her subsequent involvement with a self-help organisation staffed by survivors of sex trafficking. However, a negative outcome of her association with this organisation was her increased visibility, which in turn meant that she was identified by one of her traffickers who subsequently threatened to kill her. Coupled with an ongoing fear of retaliation, Smiriti is also contending with intrusive memories of her experiences in the brothel and her risky escape, complications surrounding her reproductive health, and alcohol abuse, all of which appear to have had a lasting impact on her physical and emotional wellbeing.

After returning to Nepal, Smiriti’s confinement in the NGO and the staff’s disclosure of her sex trafficking to her family without her consent destroyed her trust in the organisation. Smiriti believed that if she had returned home independently without the involvement of an anti-trafficking organisation, she would have been able to exercise her autonomy in deciding when and how to make contact with her family. Instead, Smiriti felt that her autonomy and agency were constrained by the NGO. It is also noteworthy that Smiriti was never followed up by the NGO once her responsibility was handed over to her father. This contradicts claims made by many Nepalese anti-trafficking NGOs that they do conduct follow up visits (for example, see Maiti Nepal 2010, p. 4).

Smiriti’s ability to gain paid employment soon after her release from the NGO has enabled her to live independently in Kathmandu. Being educated and of a marriageable age, she still believes it may be possible to find a marriage partner. Nonetheless, her experiences of family and community rejection have led to a deep sense of personal grief, which punctuates her day to day life. In summary, while Smiriti has regained some autonomy over her life and employment has given her a measure of economic independence, her reintegration into Nepalese society has equally entailed loss and social exclusion.

7.5. Chapter summary and discussion

Intersectionality refers to the way in which identity categories interact. Social location is the result of this intersection at the practical or everyday level, in terms of the privileges and oppression that individuals possess on the basis of specific identity constructs (Smith 1987; Hulko 2009). Thus, despite women sharing the same identity as a survivor of sex trafficking, reintegration is not a uniform experience. It involves multiple ongoing experiences associated with particular events or changes and is shaped by the intersection of factors at particular points in time, and reflective of the prevailing sociocultural context. While some factors may have strong effects on one woman’s
experience, these same factors may have less significance in another situation. Consequently, reintegration is a process that cannot be considered static or complete. For the women in this study, the process potentially may last a lifetime.

While acknowledging that the theoretical lens of intersectionality highlights the complexity of reintegration, it is also possible to tease out the various strands of this complexity by attempting to describe how reintegration is a process over time, involving multiple experiences, each shaped by contemporary personal and social conditions. The discussion which follows attempts to describe this process by referring to two major events raised by Malati, Kamala and Smiriti; the first being their return to their family (or attempted return), and the second, changes in health or social status.

Given the multiplicity of factors that intersect to shape experiences of reintegration it is useful to think about such factors in terms of their level of operation: macro, meso and micro. At the macro level there are societal structures such as caste, ethnicity and gender which shape people’s life chances: to a large extent the rules, beliefs and behaviours laid down by the surrounding institutions define who the individual is, how individuals are valued by society, and what they can or cannot do (World Bank & DFID 2006, p. 13). Meso level factors refer to family, community, local institutions and immediate social networks. Micro level factors include age, the personal experience of caste, education level, employment status, physical and emotional health, and individual coping behaviours.

These factors are in constant interaction shaping everyday experiences, which largely pass without notice. For example, the commonplace ‘event’ of a Nepali woman serving her family food before she herself eats, might be a pleasurable experience for that woman. What is not noticed or questioned is that the pleasurable experience is shaped by the intersection of societal gender expectations for women to be submissive in relation to their husband and family (macro level), and the woman’s personal desire to fulfil this expectation and to see herself as a ‘good’ Nepali woman (micro level).

Intersections of various factors similarly operate to shape women’s experiences of being trafficked and reintegration, except that the events involved are far removed from everyday experiences. It is from the women’s recall of particular events that the academic endeavour to understand how different factors interacted to shape particular experiences at particular times in their lives is made.
Going back to their village and meeting family and other villagers for the first time after returning to Nepal appeared to be a significant event for all three women. The way this common event was experienced was different for each woman depending on the particular intersection of factors in each situation. At the macro level all women would have been subject to prevailing societal attitudes to trafficked women as being ‘fallen’ or ‘spoilt’ women (Frederick 2006, p. 328); however, not all the women were treated as totally degraded. Micro factors such as Malati’s young age at the time of trafficking and meso level factors, such as her father’s support for her, appeared to counteract and soften potentially harsh macro level societal attitudes reflected at the local community level. This meant that for some years Malati was able to live with her family in her community.

For Kamala, micro social factors regarding her older age and status as a previously married woman at the time of trafficking intersected with societal attitudes that older women, already socially degraded through marriage failure, would likely have been complicit in being trafficked. Kamala herself anticipated a negative societal reaction from her community and devised a strategy to go home at a time when she could contribute to harvesting. In this way Kamala’s personal coping skills intersected with societal expectations of women in Nepal to contribute to household and farm related activities (Joshi 2000), to reduce the possibility of being rejected outright by her community. As in Malati’s situation, patriarchal power worked in Kamala’s favour when her father showed his support for her return, further helping to mitigate (but not eliminate) community hostility. Patriarchal power to support daughters may be a positive factor as in these cases, but such power over another person’s life also serves to reinforce male ownership of women, which can just as readily work against women and produce a very different experience of returning home, as exemplified by Smiriti’s story.

The full weight of negative societal attitudes appeared to shape Smiriti’s experiences of returning home. In fact, she did not have the opportunity to go home for some time, as her father exerted his power rooted in patriarchy to stop her from returning home while she was still living in the NGO. Here, patriarchy appeared to intersect with rigid caste condemnation of trafficked women. The practices of the NGO, which denied Smiriti control over how to approach her family, also intersected to shape Smiriti’s negative experiences of contact with her family. Finally, after Smiriti did return to her village for only one week, societal and village attitudes were overwhelmingly negative and powerful enough to overcome any wishes of her family to remain a part of their village. As a result, both Smiriti and her family were excluded from their village milieu. In Nepal
rejection by community and family is a socially catastrophic event and as such experienced as highly negative and traumatic.

Changes in health status or social status were also described as key events by all three women. For Malati, increasingly poor health as a result of being HIV positive intersected with several meso and macro factors to produce ongoing experiences of extreme distress. Nepali women are expected to marry and move to their husband’s house and have children after marriage (World Trade Press 2012). Macro level gender expectations to contribute to household and agricultural work and to marry intersected with Malati’s increasing personal physical inability to fulfil these expectations. This was compounded by the additional intersection of societal taboos against discussing sexual matters, negative societal attitudes to HIV sufferers which constrained her from explaining her perceived ‘laziness’ and ‘dependence’, and meso level factors of lack of access to medical information, locally available treatment for HIV and lack of alternative employment to field work in the village context. A further event, the visit of a health worker, intersecting with Malati’s personal capacity to challenge societal norms, led to her decision to leave her village and move to Kathmandu where HIV treatment was perceived to be available. In Kamala’s case, her personal capacity to challenge societal customs regarding arranged marriages meant that she was able to find a marriage partner based on a ‘love’ relationship. This change in marital status invoked renewed community stigmatisation against Kamala and her husband due to his marrying a woman who was previously trafficked for sex work. Kamala was further blamed and stigmatised for her inability to produce a child as is socially expected of married women.

For Smiriti, changes in her health status related to personal factors such as the ongoing emotional distress of family rejection, past trauma of brothel life, gynaecological problems, and alcohol dependence and her personal desire to find a marriage partner, were largely experienced as stressful, but mixed with some sense of hope for a better future. This experience reflects the intersection of a number of factors. At the macro level, societal gender expectations for women to marry, social status derived from being higher caste and having had some higher education suggested to Smiriti that she should and could seek to fulfil her personal desire to find a life partner. These factors, however, intersected with the personally constraining factors outlined above, which were perceived by Smiriti to lower her chances of being an ‘acceptable’ partner in marriage.

In conclusion, the social gendered norms for women, stigma associated with sex trafficking and resulting discrimination, lack of alternative employment in villages besides agriculture, limited or no access to health information and health services in rural villages, disempowering NGO practices
and, in some cases, poor physical and psychological health, interacted in different ways to constrain the women’s aspirations in life. Nevertheless, personal strengths, such as a willingness to go against societal norms and marry again, capacity to endure social cruelty and rejection, the ability to live independently, and the courage to continue to hope for a better life, to some extent mitigated the array of socially created negative experiences. Perhaps it is not surprising that ‘you should endure’ is a common Nepali saying. The following chapter draws on all twenty women’s experiences to explore their overall experiences as well as the barriers to and facilitators of reintegration.
8. Chapter Eight: Discussion and conclusion

8.1. Introduction

The primary aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of reintegration of twenty women previously trafficked for sex work in India and living in Nepal. The study sought to answer two questions: How do survivors of sex trafficking experience reintegration, and what are the barriers and the supporting factors that facilitate reintegration? This chapter brings together the findings presented in the previous four chapters. It focuses on reintegration as an ongoing process that involves multiple pathways, and identifies the barriers and facilitators which are a major part of this process. It then identifies recommendations for policy and practice arising from the findings, the limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

Before turning to examine the returnees’ experiences of reintegration, it is important to first reflect on the identities of these women. Sex trafficked women in Nepal are commonly depicted as being young, unmarried, illiterate, lower caste or from a minority ethnic background, and from rural villages (Simkhada 2008; Adhikari 2011; Gurung 2014). Yet, the participants in this study included higher caste women, women with higher than average education, married women, and women with children. While not a representative sample, the makeup of this sample does suggest that the diversity amongst sex trafficked women in Nepal may be under-recognised in the literature. In addition, as the findings in this study have demonstrated, if a returnee does not fit the stereotype of a sex trafficked woman, her story may be subjected to critical scrutiny or disbelief. This lack of validation can be problematic for women in the reintegration process and suggests, at a minimum, the need for increased public awareness of the diversity of sex trafficked women.

The following section provides an overview of the study’s findings on the returnees’ experiences of reintegration with reference to both commonalities and differences. This precedes a discussion on the different pathways the women took in their reintegration journeys.

8.2. Women’s experiences of reintegration

The literature review in Chapter Two identified the lack of a universally accepted definition of reintegration. However, despite the multiple meanings attributed to reintegration, it is possible to discern a number of common indicators of successful reintegration from this literature. These indicators include social, economic and political inclusion, access to necessary services and resources, and a sense of wellbeing and safety. At the time of interview, the factors that would indicate successful reintegration were far from optimal for all participants in this study.
Discrimination, social exclusion, ongoing health concerns, financial insecurity, limited access to health services and poor marriageability prospects were commonly reported experiences. The effects of the inhuman treatment endured in the brothels also continued to impact the women’s day to day lives once they had returned to Nepal.

Despite these commonalities, the three case studies presented in the previous chapter also demonstrate that each woman’s experience of reintegration is unique. Through the application of an intersectional lens, these case studies illuminate how factors such as age, marital status, caste, ethnicity, health status and educational level intersect to produce different experiences of reintegration. These different intersectional configurations were influential in determining the level of family support the women received and the particular challenges they faced in re-establishing their lives and relationships in either village or urban settings. In addition, their relevance for each woman was context and time dependent.

The use of intersectionality in this study has demonstrated the importance of understanding reintegration as a dynamic, changeable process rather than a fixed trajectory. The women’s accounts presented in Chapter Seven illuminate the importance of adopting a long term perspective on reintegration in order to more fully understand their experiences. If outcomes for returnees are to be measured in a meaningful way, reintegration needs to be conceptualised as an ongoing, variable process that is shaped by the intersection of various identity markers. Accordingly, as an analytical tool, intersectionality has potential for knowledge generation in future research on reintegration.

The findings from this study also demonstrate the importance of understanding reintegration in terms of returnees’ different pathways in returning to Nepal. Notably, for the participants in this study, these pathways diverged again when the women returned to their families and communities. The following section provides an overview of these pathways, tracking the women from their time in the brothels to their place of residence at the time of interview.

The twenty women in this study were held captive in brothels in India from a few days to ten years. During this time, they were all subject to physical, sexual and emotional abuse. In the face of this abuse, the women showed great resilience in surviving their ill-treatment. Eight of these women managed to escape, which reflects their willingness to take risks in the face of sometimes extreme danger. Three women were eventually released from brothels, while nine were rescued.

Following their exit from the brothels twelve women were repatriated to Nepal with the assistance of anti-trafficking NGOs, while eight women found their own way back to Nepal. These findings
are noteworthy since it is often assumed in the literature on sex trafficking that women return to their countries of origin with the assistance of NGOs. Notably, the independent returnees were able to make their own decisions regarding if, when and how they would return to their families. However, for most of these women, the lack of protection afforded by NGOs meant enduring harrowing physical abuse on their journey back to Nepal. On the other hand, while those assisted by NGOs were housed in secure accommodation, some of these women reported being frustrated by lengthy delays and the controlling practices of NGO workers and other authorities.

Once back in Nepal, eighteen women attempted to return to their families. Two women were unable to return due to their unique family circumstances. Ten women were assisted to return to their families by NGOs while the eight independent returnees made their own way to their families. Much of the literature on reintegration focuses on the experiences of women who return to their families with the assistance of NGOs and therefore little is known about women who return independently to their families. In view of this limited recognition given to this group, the experiences of the independent returnees captured in this study make a useful contribution to the existing knowledge base on reintegration.

The majority of the participants were initially supported by their parents when they returned home, with just three experiencing outright rejection. A key finding from this study is the power that community members exercised to discriminate against and socially exclude women who they knew or suspected had been sex trafficked to India. This finding resonates with other studies which show that returnee women are often stigmatised and rejected when they return to their communities (Mahendra et al. 2001; Hennink & Simkhada 2004, Chaulagai 2009; Poudel 2009; Jha & Madison 2011). The returnees reported verbal abuse, ostracism and being treated as ‘untouchables’, which for some entailed being refused access to communal facilities such as toilets. Essentially, many of the returnees were denied their basic social and civil rights. Community rejection thus emerged as a major barrier to reintegration and is explored later in this chapter in the section on barriers to reintegration. Over time, these discriminatory community attitudes and practices played a significant role in influencing thirteen women to leave their villages. Other reasons cited for leaving included a desire to gain an education or improve economic prospects. For some women, limited or no access to health care was a further incentive to leave. Notably, three of the four returnees living with HIV/AIDS left their villages and returned to NGOs in order to receive appropriate health care.

At the time of interview, the thirteen women who left their village in addition to the two women who did not attempt to return home were living in Kathmandu, either in NGOs or independently.
Only five women remained living with their families. Four of these women subsequently married and moved to their husband’s village.

Regardless of where the women were living, their ongoing lives involved a struggle for survival. The main challenges for those women residing in villages centred on their low economic status as a result of having married men perceived to be less ‘desirable’. For these returnees, marriage signified social status and a chance to regain some power in their families and communities. However, a lack of land ownership and paid employment were common problems reported by these women. Alternatively, some described having to carry out physically arduous agricultural labour. Health concerns were also repeatedly noted, as well as ongoing discrimination and abuse by some family and community members. In the face of this negative treatment, the coping strategy employed by most women was silence. Nonetheless, a few women did describe how, on occasion, they had challenged their abusers.

It is interesting to note that all five women who remained living in their village were independent returnees. None of the women who were assisted by anti-trafficking organisations to return home remained in their villages. This raises questions about the effectiveness of the reintegration interventions of these NGOs, and this point is taken up later in the chapter in the section on recommendations arising from the findings.

The main challenges for those living independently in Kathmandu were increased risk of sexual abuse and exploitation, finding adequately paid work, lack of contact with family, and health problems arising from their time in the brothels. Despite these challenges, this group of women exercised some autonomy in terms of their living arrangements and finding a husband of their choice. This level of autonomy is not generally available to Nepali women who live with their families in village settings where patriarchal values and gendered expectations of women are strongly adhered to.

Women who were living indefinitely in NGO shelters resided in a somewhat artificial and protected institutional environment where their basic needs were met but they had limited interaction with the broader community. Some of these women had the chance to further their education or were offered part time, unskilled work in the NGOs. While appreciative of these aspects of NGO life, dissatisfaction was also expressed about restrictions on their autonomy and the limited work opportunities open to them outside the institution. The concern for these women was their total reliance on the anti-trafficking NGOs for their ongoing welfare, which also potentially stifled their ability to learn independent living skills.
Many women expressed some hope of achieving a better life in the future. Depending on their circumstances, they sought to do this in a variety of ways, such as by building their farm assets, finding a suitable marriage partner, and giving their children a better education. Furthermore, most women wanted to become economically independent and a few expressed a desire to improve their financial circumstance by opening their own business or going overseas to work. However, such ventures required obtaining credit from a lending institution which was perceived to be almost impossible due to lack of citizenship and land ownership.

While some studies suggest that many formerly trafficked women return to sex work in either India or Nepal (Terre des Hommes 2005; Simkhada 2008; Kara 2009; Locke 2010), this was not considered to be an option for any of the women in this study. Brothel life was generally recalled as a time of ‘hell’ and abuse and, regardless of how hard life was in Nepal, all women expressed a strong aversion to sex work.

Over time, some participants achieved a modest measure of economic security and improved social status. However, for all participants, reintegration continued to be an open ended, ongoing struggle for economic and social survival requiring great perseverance and resilience. In the process of reintegration, it is clear that the participants encountered significant barriers as well as some practices that facilitated their reintegration. The major barriers to reintegration that emerged in this study are discussed in the following section.

8.3. Barriers to reintegration

**Societal construction of gender in Nepalese society**

Nepal’s patriarchal social system discriminates against women, and the Nepali caste system discriminates against those from lower caste and minority ethnic backgrounds. Some studies suggest that women from lower caste and minority ethnic groups in Nepal are more easily accepted back into their families or communities following sex trafficking (SAHARA & JIT 2004; Mahat 2011). However, the findings from this study suggest that gender significantly shaped experiences of reintegration whereas caste position and ethnicity appeared to have less influence.

Nepalese women are subject to gendered expectations to be sexually ‘pure’ and virtuous, to undertake physically arduous household and agricultural work, to marry and produce children and to fulfil cultural obligations in worship and social aspects of life (Bennett 1983; Crawford 2010). In this study, all women, whether high or lower caste, or from a Tibeto-Nepalese or tribal background,
faced discrimination based on gender expectations of women, which was exacerbated by the stigma associated with sex work. In some instances, women living with HIV/AIDS endured further stigmatisation.

However, in relation to reintegration, the way in which gender relations and male power over women operates is nuanced. For example, some women benefited from the power their fathers were able to exercise in showing personal and public support of their daughters when they first returned home. Some women conformed to gender expectations by marrying, and perceived that a supportive husband discouraged negative community attitudes and behaviours towards them. Consequently, male power may protect sex trafficking survivors from community discrimination in the short term; however, this reinforces unequal power relations, in which women are dependent on men’s power to either bestow or withdraw support.

Similarly some women conformed to gendered behaviour norms in order to avoid disputes, such as remaining silent in the face of deriding comments about them by the villagers. These strategies somewhat reduced discriminatory behaviour towards them, but arguably reinforce beliefs that it is women who should change their behaviour in order to fit in, rather than communities which should change their destructive attitudes and practices towards returnees.

As discussed previously, all participants who returned to their family’s village were subjected to degrading treatment, verbal abuse and humiliation, which constitute a violation of their human rights. Some women who were accepted by their family viewed this more as an act of benevolence bestowed by the family rather than their right to return home. The participants’ views, no doubt, reflect Nepal’s patriarchal societal norms in which adult women can only inherit parental property under certain conditions and daughters are strongly encouraged to leave their parents’ home after marriage. As a result, participants commonly reported feelings of powerless, which were exacerbated by factors such as family rejection, discrimination, poor marriageability prospects, limited access to education and employment, lack of income, and no legal rights to parental property.

A study by Allendorf (2007) suggests that land ownership for Nepali women can be a source of empowerment since women who own land are significantly more likely to have the final say in household decisions. Similarly for refugee populations, access to and control over productive land resources is stated as the single most important factor influencing the potential for successful reintegration of returnees (Ballard 2003). In this study, only seven women had acquired land and property through marriage. The majority (thirteen) did not own any land or property. For these
women, having no legitimate access to home or rights to family land or property created further barriers in their reintegration.

**Negative community attitudes**

The significance of community in Nepal has been highlighted by Bowles (2013, p. 9) who argues that the reintegration of formerly trafficked women is ‘almost completely dependent on what that community allows’. It is apparent in this study that negative community attitudes undermined family support and stigmatised the returnees as well their families. The families of most of the women were living in rural and remote villages of Nepal. The women’s families were heavily reliant on community support in performing social and economic activities such as arranging the marriages of their children and ‘parma’ or labour exchange. Consequently, some of the returnees’ families found it extremely difficult to challenge the negative attitudes of community members. In one extreme case, a family was displaced from their community due to allowing their daughter to stay in the family.

In the context of displaced or refugee people, the UNHCR (2004, p. 5) states that reintegration can be ‘a socially transformative process’ for communities because individuals may return with new skills, education, resources and training acquired during their displacement. In a similar vein, it could be argued that returnee women’s resilience in surviving brothel life could be a cause for community celebration. In addition, their knowledge of the circumstances and repercussions of trafficking could potentially inform community strategies aimed at preventing trafficking. However, in this study community members viewed the women’s return as a social threat and their presence symbolised shame to their families and the broader community. As previously noted, this lack of support from family and community was a significant factor which forced many women to leave their villages.

Due to strongly entrenched expectations for Nepalese women to have a male provider or guardian, those returnees who were living independently were often treated with suspicion. In many cases, the women who had left their families and moved to Kathmandu were not equipped with the life skills of finding work and accommodation, and most lacked educational qualifications and citizenship. Lacking these independent living skills and formal citizenship made the women more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Many women later found low paying labouring jobs and were struggling to cope with the rising costs of living in Kathmandu as well as the costs of seeking treatment for health conditions.
Physical and emotional health problems

The findings show that all participants experienced physical, sexual and emotional abuse in the brothels and, for some, this abuse continued during their return to Nepal. This abuse had a negative impact on the returnees’ attempts to fulfil family and community gendered work expectations such as undertaking heavy agricultural work and, for some women, conceiving a child. The four returnees living with HIV/AIDS hid their HIV status due to the fear of discrimination. For these women, the pressure of having to hide their HIV status from their families was an additional stressor. They were further restricted in what household tasks they could undertake and some had to devise reasons as to why they did not want to marry. Their health was further jeopardised by not having access to anti-retroviral medicine in village settings. As a result of these factors, eventually they all left their families.

Many other women struggled with untreated health problems including complex gynaecological and fertility problems. Often, their conditions had gone untreated due to fears regarding revealing their sex trafficking background to friends, families, partners and doctors. The cost of health care or the lack of health care facilities in the remote villages were reported as further barriers to treatment, and without access to specialised treatment these women expressed doubts that their medical problems could be resolved.

A few women in this study reported that the catastrophic events which they experienced during their trafficking still intruded into their thoughts and caused sleep disturbances and nightmares. Furthermore, many women reported having intense feelings of anger and revenge towards their traffickers and a lack of trust of people in general. The physical, reproductive and psychological health problems reported by the participants reduced their quality of life and thwarted their attempts to reintegrate and reach their full potential.

NGOs’ lack of a victim centred approach to reintegration

Many participants who were repatriated by NGOs were appreciative of being offered shelter upon their immediate return, as well as some of the opportunities extended to them by NGOs for training and education. However, the findings highlight the potential for NGO policies and practices to have a negative impact on women’s experiences of reintegration, largely due to a failure to take a victim centred approach. The women reported practices such as workers not allowing them to leave the NGOs on their own accord, conductiong HIV tests without their prior consent, and sharing their personal information with their families without first consulting them. Others reported being
pressed to file a case against their traffickers or undertake compulsory skills training. These practices are considered unethical and a violation of human rights in terms of international standards that recommend all services and reintegration assistance be made available to the victim on a strictly voluntary basis (IOM 2007, p. 81; UNHCR, WHO & UNAIDS 2009).

Some women identified family violence and poverty as the main reasons for their trafficking. NGOs seemed to pay little attention to individual women’s family circumstances when arranging to reunite them with their families. In some cases, women were sent back to abusive families and did not receive any support from the NGOs in the face of hostile reactions from family and community members. It appeared that the NGO workers did not conduct any follow-up visits to ensure that the women were safe once they were ‘handed over’ to their families. It has been noted that poorly designed assistance potentially results in more harm than help to sex trafficking victims (Lisborg 2009). In this study it is evident that this potential for harm was very real.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the women living in NGOs are integrated into a somewhat artificial community, comprised of survivors and NGO staff. These women are dependent on the NGOs for their existence, which can operate as a disincentive for women to leave and live independently. This group of women expressed uncertainty about their future and concern about living their young lives inside an NGO. On the other hand they were also aware that they could not receive similar benefits if they returned to their impoverished families or decided to live independently.

8.4. **Factors that can facilitate integration**

Despite the formidable barriers to reintegration identified in the previous section, the participants in this study were able to identify some factors in their environment and within themselves which facilitated their reintegration. These factors are discussed next.

**Family support**

Many women in this study recalled that being separated from their families during their trafficking and their desire to be reunited with their families had been strong motivating factors to return home. Most parents initially expressed happiness at their daughter’s return home, but later some rejected them or suggested that they leave the family due to social pressure from extended family or community members. Nonetheless, many participants still believed that family support is crucial in order to survive and feel included in society. Similarly, Brunovskis and Surtees (2007) found in their study that that the family is a central source of support and a necessary safety net for returnee
women. Notably, all five returnees who were living with their families at the time of interview perceived that the support they received from family members, in particular from their husband or parents, helped them to cope with the villagers’ negative reactions.

The returnees were also able to identify elements of family support and behaviour that were most helpful to them. This included not being blamed for their trafficking, family members being prepared to challenge villagers’ discriminatory practices, and being included in valued cultural practices. In addition, the returnees reported the benefits associated with being encouraged to start a new life or receiving ongoing support if they moved away from their families. Such unconditional acceptance and encouragement appeared to enhance the women’s chances of successful reintegration, regardless of where they lived.

Having a ‘good’ marriage, preferably with a man with a good income and education, is a highly desirable status in Nepal (Mahendra et al. 2001). All of the returnees in this study expressed a desire to find a husband. Of the eight women who did marry after returning to Nepal, most reported that having the identity of ‘wife’ significantly improved their status in their community. Furthermore, having children appeared to provide these women with a valued social role and personal satisfaction, which also placed a part in facilitating their reintegration.

**Increased autonomy and independence**

The findings suggest that having some control over decision making can have a positive influence on women’s reintegration. Notably, the small number of women in this study who returned to Nepal independently of NGOs were able to make choices about how and when to return home. Unlike the returnees who were assisted by anti-trafficking organisations, these women were in a better position to hide their trafficking backgrounds and to construct their absences in a way that they knew would be acceptable to their communities. Nonetheless, while these women were able to exercise some autonomy in their decision making, being ‘unaccompanied women’ placed them at significant risk for further abuse and exploitation.

Those returnees who eventually left their villages to take up residence in Kathmandu initially struggled to establish independent lives. Independent living for women is considered to be an atypical situation from a patriarchal perspective in Nepal where it is believed that women need the protection of a male (Joshi 2001). However, despite risking social disapproval for not adhering to societal norms for women, one positive factor associated with independent living was that it allowed the women to exercise more control over disclosure of personal information. When these
women found paid work they did not mention their backgrounds and therefore enjoyed some anonymity and relief from gossiping and discrimination. As a result, this increased autonomy and independence enhanced these women’s reintegration into urban life in Kathmandu. After a period of time, some women also married a husband of their choice. Possibly, this was a further assertion of their independence by challenging the Nepali tradition of arranged marriages (Acharya, Mathema & Acharya 1999; Joshi 2001).

Resilience

Resilience, which encompasses the capacity to adapt to extremely adverse conditions (Windle 1999; Rutter 2012), emerged as an important factor in women’s survival and capacity to reintegrate into Nepalese society. It is apparent in this study that women survived the most challenging conditions while being trafficked and living in the brothels. On returning to their families, most of them initially attempted to adapt back into community life regardless of the humiliation and injustice they experienced. The women who stayed in their villages long term, exhibited resilience in finding ways to manage or reduce discrimination and live a reasonable life in their community. Most of these women were actively engaged in family life and contributed to their family’s livelihood by undertaking farm work.

The women who moved to Kathmandu similarly exhibited resilience by developing strategies to cope with the formidable challenges they faced, especially after their initial arrival when they were vulnerable to abuse and further sexual exploitation. Despite often having no money, family, friends or access to services provided by NGOs, many of these women demonstrated resilience by fending for themselves and finding work. Other forms of resilience were evident with some women actively pursuing legal action against their traffickers or becoming involved in trafficking awareness campaigns.

As discussed in the literature review, suicidal ideation is common among formerly trafficked women (Zimmerman & Pocock 2013). In this study many women did contemplate suicide at different times. However, they did not act on their thoughts, and all expressed a determination to work towards a better future. Despite experiencing social exclusion, financial hardship and other form of adversity after returning to Nepal, all of the participants reflected that life in Nepal was far better than working in a brothel. This thought appeared to foster their resilience and assisted them to be ‘future focused’ in their ongoing attempts to rebuild their lives.
Interestingly, at the time of interview, many participants were more concerned about their survival and personal development than focusing on the negative consequences of being viewed as ‘sex trafficked’. The experiences of these returnees suggest that they were resilient survivors and consequently did not fit the image of helpless victims of sex trafficking that is so often portrayed in the media and the rhetoric of anti-trafficking organisations in Nepal.

8.5. **Recommendations and implications arising from the findings**

Many anti-trafficking organisations in Nepal encourage and assist previously trafficked women to return to their families in village settings. ‘Family reintegration’ is viewed as a core component of their work. However, by not critically appraising this goal these institutions risk minimising the damaging impacts of the discrimination and exclusion faced by returnees at the community level after they return to their families. These returnees then face further violations of their human rights, which is not in accord with rights based practice.

Anti-trafficking NGOs and government services which have responsibility to assist formerly trafficked women should follow up the situation of returnees to ensure their rights and safety are safeguarded. The current NGOs practices of reintegrating women into abusive families and communities need to be reviewed. This includes a review of their assessment practices and how they decide that it is safe for a woman to return home. The root causes of trafficking for women, such as poverty and violence, need to be identified and carefully addressed by NGOs before sending women back to their family. The circumstances which make women vulnerable to trafficking and result in them leaving home can be the cause of their leaving once again after they have returned to their families (Pandey, Tewari & Bhowmick 2013).

This study demonstrates the need for community work at a local level to reduce the negative impact of discriminatory community attitudes towards women who return from sex work to their communities. A report by SAHARA and JIT (2004, p. 88) suggests that various support groups working at the community level can encourage families and communities to accept returnee women. However, it is acknowledged that it is a formidable challenge to change gender relationships and associated cultural attitudes and practices, especially in the context of Nepal which has well entrenched traditions and customs. NGOs’ reintegration initiatives in villages need to be complemented by socially and culturally sensitive education and awareness raising activities. In addition, they should also carry out comprehensive assessments of the risks that have resulted in harmful consequences for returnees. In order to enhance women’s reintegration in rural Nepal, rigid
discriminatory practices and laws which limit women’s inheritance rights to parental property also need to be challenged and reformed.

The difficulties experienced by women living with HIV/AIDS reintegrating into their communities needs to be addressed. Sex trafficked women returning from India are commonly blamed for bringing HIV to Nepal and spreading it into the communities. In a society where a women’s sexuality, sex trafficking and HIV are taboo subjects, returnee women are under pressure to keep their HIV status secret to avoid discrimination. In this context, societal discrimination against individuals with HIV must be challenged and changed if women are to be expected to be open about their health status. HIV/AIDS is a public health issue which needs to be dealt with at the societal level with education, awareness rising and non-discriminatory approaches rather than victimising the individual.

The findings from this study suggest that greater transparency and external scrutiny of the activities of anti-trafficking organisations in Nepal are warranted. In addition, these NGOs need to re-orient their efforts to ensure that they are adopting a victim-centred approach to reintegration. Several studies have already provided direction in this regard, highlighting the need for NGOs to recognise the diversity of sex trafficked women and focus on individual circumstances (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007; Pandey, Tewari & Bhownick 2013), consult with women about their current and ongoing needs (Wickham 2009; Chen & Marcovici 2003), and to keep human rights at the forefront of reintegration efforts (Segrave, Milivojevic & Pickering 2009; Cody 2012). Essentially a victim-centred approach to reintegration focuses on exploring women’s needs and strengths, identifying obstacles, and finding appropriate solutions in partnership with each woman. NGOs also need to incorporate follow-up services into their reintegration programs that are sensitive to the individual circumstances of returnees and, if necessary, recognise their need for anonymity. Access to information is essential to empower women and to prevent them from abuse and discrimination. This includes clear information on reporting abuse, avenues for assistance for legal and health problems, property rights, citizenship and human rights.

Special consideration needs to be given to those women residing long-term in NGO shelters whose capacity to live independently has been diminished. Rather than accommodating these women in institutional settings, anti-trafficking organisations need to give consideration to providing alternative living options for those women who cannot return to their families. Most importantly, these women’s views need to be sought on what these alternative accommodation arrangements may look like.
Compensation may help returnee women to reintegrate into their families and promote their economic independence. The law in Nepal does make provision for compensation for victims of trafficking and, in some circumstances, their families. However, as pointed out in Chapter Two, it is not possible to enforce this law if traffickers do not have any property or are not identified. It is also likely that some women will not want to pursue legal action. One possible solution to this problem is for the Nepalese government to set up a compensation fund using both donors’ money and traffickers’ property. If this was to occur, it would also be important for provision to be made for direct transfer of compensation monies to victims.

8.6. Future directions for research

In the process of interviewing returnee women it was evident that there were many areas surrounding sex trafficking which could usefully be explored to provide different perspectives on reintegration. Rigid community attitudes and discriminatory practices towards sexually trafficked women were explored from the perspectives of the women who were subjected to this negative treatment. Understanding the experiences of families and their decision making regarding accepting or rejecting a sexually trafficked daughter or wife is an additional important area of research. Knowledge of this kind could reduce stigmatisation and promote acceptance of returnees.

Some returnees’ circumstances were very complex and warrant further exploration. For example, one woman was pregnant outside of her marriage at the time of her return to Nepal and two women were trafficked with their children. Their experiences of reintegration need to be more fully researched in terms of their additional responsibilities as mothers and the needs of their children. Another four women were HIV positive. All of these women were not able to reside with their families and their particular complex circumstances warrant further investigation in terms of what role they play in women’s attempts to re-establish their lives in Nepal.

In Nepal, international donors are willing to invest huge amounts of capital in the numerous anti-trafficking initiatives taken to rescue women and support them in their reintegration (Asman 2009). However, outcome studies regarding women who have supposedly returned home or reintegrated are lacking since NGOs appear not to undertake systematic follow up of these women. Additionally, the findings of this study suggest that many trafficked women can return to Nepal on their own. In this context, further research is needed to compare the success of independent returnees’ reintegration and NGO assisted reintegration.
The internal management and fund allocation of anti-trafficking NGOs along with the living conditions for women residing in their shelters have not been extensively investigated. Greater scrutiny of anti-trafficking NGOs is required to evaluate their strategies for women’s reintegration. In-depth exploration of NGOs’ practical life skills training programs and an evaluation of their capacity to assist women’s reintegration is also needed.

Lastly, the emotional and psychological problems that may arise for women from prolonged residence in NGOs or after experiencing rejection from their family and community have not yet been addressed by any research. Research of this kind has the potential to improve life outcomes for women and inform NGOs’ practices and policies.

8.7. Conclusion

As discussed in chapter two, several studies have explored the challenges faced by sex trafficked women who attempt to re-establish their lives in Nepal (Chen & Marcovici 2003; Chaulagai 2009; Poudel 2009; Adhikari 2011). What differentiates this research from previous studies on reintegration in Nepal is that firstly, this study has offered an understanding of women’s experiences over a period of time including their ongoing struggles to normalise their living. Secondly, this study includes the experiences of those women who were not assisted by NGOs in their reintegration. Thirdly, this study provides an understanding of the major barriers and facilitators that returnee women experienced at an individual, family and community level. Finally, this study provides a critical perspective on anti-trafficking organisations’ rehabilitation and reintegration processes and provides important insights into how returnees themselves experienced these interventions.

Anti-trafficking NGOs in Nepal are involved in the family reintegration of returnees (Evans & Bhattarai 2000; Joshi 2001; Crawford & Kaufman 2008; Locke 2010; Bowles 2013). The measure of success of reintegration for anti-trafficking organisations is generally based on the notion that women return home, remain there, and do not return to sex work. This study shows that formerly trafficked women may manage their own reintegration without the help of NGOs and that reintegration may involve leaving the village setting but not returning to sex work. This signals the need to think more broadly about the concept of reintegration. Reintegration into village life should not be privileged as ‘successful’ reintegration, nor should a woman’s decision to leave village life be considered a failure of reintegration. Strategies need to be put in place to assist returnees regardless of the setting in which they attempt to rebuild their lives.
Woman’s resilience played an important role in surviving brothel life and persevering with the challenges of reintegration. The woman’s personal qualities such as their capacity to exercise autonomy and control over decision making, adaptability and optimism, and determination to deal with life’s challenges, helped them to cope and survive at an individual level. At the same time, the structural barriers that women faced in reintegration tested their resilience. Consequently, what emerges from this study is that women’s resilience should not be considered apart from other factors in successful reintegration. If viewed in isolation, there is a danger that women will be held responsible for their own reintegration and that success or failure will be seen as a reflection of a woman’s personal capacities. Schoon (2006, p. 16) argues that ‘adapting functioning in the face of adversity is not only dependent on the characteristics of the individual, but is greatly influenced by processes and interactions arising from the family and the wider environment’.

The findings of this study support the importance of utilising both a human rights framework and feminist perspectives in understanding sex trafficking and reintegration. Enhancing an individual’s resilience without addressing structural barriers to reintegration unfairly places the locus for change at the individual level. The focus for change should be on reducing structural barriers in Nepal by addressing discrimination against women, improving access to education, providing accessible health care, creating employment opportunities, and building family and community support.

For the twenty women in this study, reintegration was an ongoing lifelong process involving a mix of gains and losses that permeated their lives on a day to day basis. It is clear that gender discrimination posed the greatest barrier to reintegration and constrained women’s valiant attempts to rebuild their lives. Structural changes aimed at building a more equitable society are needed to harness the full potential of all women to contribute to and benefit from civil society in Nepal, regardless of their social status.
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188


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APPENDICES

Appendix I: THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

1: Tell me about yourself.
Prompts: Is there a pseudonym that you would like to use instead of your real name? What is your caste and ethnicity? Tell me more about your caste, ethnicity, family, and about your community where you are living now. What work do you do? How old are you? What is your educational background? Where are you originally from? Are you married? Who else is living with you?

2: How did you go to India?
Prompts: Tell me about the circumstances at the time that you were trafficked? How old were you at that time? Did you know your trafficker before? How did he/she convince you to go with him? Were you informed about the work you would be doing before you left? Did your family know about your trafficking?

3: Could you please tell me a little bit about your experiences in India?
Prompts: How long did you work in India? How did you find your brothel owner (gharwali)? Was she also from Nepal? How many Nepalese girls were working there? How did you find life there? Was it a friendly environment? Did you ever receive any punishment? Did you have enough to eat while living there? How was your workload? Did you miss your friends and family back home in Nepal?

4: Can you tell me about why and how you left the brothel?
Prompts: Did you return to Nepal voluntarily? How did you manage to escape from the brothel? What sorts of things were you thinking about before leaving the brothel? Were you able to bring any of your earnings or jewellery from your work?

5: Tell me more about your repatriation.
Prompts: What was your motivation for returning to Nepal? Who helped you return to Nepal? Did you receive support from any anti-trafficking organisations during your repatriation? What sorts of things did they do to help you? Did you face any difficulties during this time? How long did you wait to come back to Nepal? Do you find life better living in Nepal than working in India? Why?
6: Could you please tell me about the support you received from any anti-trafficking organisations. Prompts: How did the organisation support you in your reintegration? Did you have a health check up or a blood test after returning to Nepal? Did you file a case against your trafficker? Did the organisation help you? What sort of skills related training did the organisation provide for you? How was/is life living at this organisation? Do you have any comments on organisational working policy? Did/Do you have any expectations from the organisation? How would your life have been without organisational support? How long did you wait before you made contact with your family?

7: Tell me about the reactions of your family and community after you returned to Nepal. Prompts: How is your life now? Is it better then living in India? How did your parents/family/community members react after you returned to Nepal? Did you experience any unexpected reactions from your family/husband/friends/community members? Did you tell them that you went to India and worked in a brothel? If yes, how did they react to this? If no, why didn’t you tell them? How is life different now than what it was before you were trafficked?

8: What sorts of things have helped you most in the reintegration process? Prompts: Tell me about the key factors that enabled you to stay with your family. Do you think that you have a similar life to other women in your community? How long did it take for you to be reintegrated? Have you ever been discriminated against by your people because of being trafficked? What sort of support did you receive from your husband/family on your return? Tell me about the way of life and culture in your community? How are trafficked women viewed? Are/were your community and friends supportive to you? Are you satisfied with your current job? Do you have your own land to work with?

9: What are the barriers to your reintegration? Prompts: What were the hard / frustrating things you experienced after returning to Nepal? How did your parents/friends/community members react on your return? Do you have any idea why your parents/friends/community members reacted this way to your return? Have you received any threats from your trafficker and his/her family? How do you find life living in this organisation? Do you have any health problems? Tell me about your experience living with such health problems/HIV+? Is that the main barrier to your reintegration? Could you please tell me about any difficult experiences with your family/husband/community members that relate to your previous trafficking?
10: What are you doing at the moment to earn a livelihood?
Prompts: Are you independent? Where are you employed? What sort of job are you doing at the moment? How easy/how hard is to find new job? How much do you earn? Is it enough for you and your family? If you are unemployed at this stage how are you coping? What are the difficulties in finding a job? How hard/easy is to go back to your previous work/farm and field work? What are your crucial needs at the moment? Do you feel safe living in an organisation/living with your husband/living in a particular community/in your workplace?

11: What are your plans for the future?
Prompts: Where would you like to go after leaving the rehabilitation centre? What are the marriageability criteria for a girl in your culture? How easy/hard is it to find the right guy for your marriage? Is there any chance for you to go back to India again? What sort of life do you think you may have been living now if you had not been trafficked for sex work?

12: Is there anything else that you want to share with me?

13: How did you find the interview?
Appendix II: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Sex Trafficking in Nepal: Women’s experiences of reintegration

The information provided below will assist you to decide whether you wish to take part in this study.

What is the study about?

This study is about the experiences of women who have returned to live in Nepal after being trafficked to India for commercial sex work. The main aim of the study is to explore women’s experiences of returning to their families and communities, what factors have enabled them to reintegrate, and what, if any, difficulties they have encountered in returning home. We currently know very little about women’s experiences of returning to Nepal. It is important that women are able to tell their stories so that their views and concerns can be brought to the attention of policy makers and the organisations set up to assist women reintegrate into their communities.

Who is the Researcher?

My name is Jyoti Sharma and I am a PhD candidate from the School of Social Work and Human Services at the University of Queensland, Australia. I am originally from Nepal. My interest in this topic stems from my work with a non-government organisation in Nepal that assists repatriated sexually trafficked women return to their communities. During the time I worked with this organisation, I met many women who were returning home or trying to make a new life for themselves. I am interested in finding out more about women’s experiences of returning to their communities so that I can find out about what sorts of things would make this transition easier.

How will the study be conducted and what is the role of participants?

I will be conducting individual interviews with women who are willing to share their stories with me. It is anticipated that each interview will take about 1½ hours. The interview will be organised at a
time and place that is convenient and safe for you. At this interview, I will be asking you to tell me a little bit about how you were trafficked to India, how you were rescued or escaped, and what happened after you were bought back to Nepal. The main focus of the interview will be about your personal experience of returning home, including what difficulties you may have encountered, and what factors have helped you to fit in to your original or new community. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped. These tapes will be later transcribed and translated into English.

What are my rights as a participant?

If you wish, you can bring a friend or support person to the interview. The interview will be conducted at a time and safe place of your choosing and you can stop the interview at any time. You do not have to respond to any questions that you do not want to answer, and you are free to tell as much or as little about what happened. You can withdraw from the study at any time with no questions asked, and your interview responses will not be used in the research. If you wish to talk with the researcher about your participation in the study, either in person or by telephone, this can be arranged. If you are left with any negative feelings after the interview and want to talk with someone, with your permission the researcher will arrange for you to meet with a counsellor who works with trafficked women.

What potential risks are associated with participating in the research?

It is possible that talking about your experiences may bring up feelings of anxiety, shame or fear both during the interview and after the interview. These are common reactions that women who have been trafficked experience when they reflect back on what happened. If it is the case that you feel distressed and do not want to complete the interview, the interviewer will respect your wishes. The researcher also understands that if your story became known to others in your community, this could result in you and your family feeling uncomfortable and socially isolated. For this reason, every effort will be taken to protect your anonymity and confidentiality before, during and after the interview.

How will my anonymity and confidentiality be maintained?

You do not have to give your name and you may use a pseudonym or false name. You will be identified by a pseudonym rather than your real name in the written up transcripts of the interviews. Any material that could potentially identify you—such as the names of organisations, traffickers and place names—will be removed from the transcripts. Both the audiotapes and transcripts will be locked in a secure office in the School of Social Work and Human Services at the University of Queensland, and the researcher will be the only person who has access to this material. Your name, address, details of your family or any other identifying material will not appear in any report written up on the findings of the study. When the research is written up, no material will be published that could identify you as a particular respondent.
Will participating in the research be of benefit to me?

Your participation may not be of personal benefit to you, although for some women having the opportunity to talk about their experiences in a supportive, non-judgemental environment can have a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing. The information you provide in the interview will make an important contribution to building knowledge about the experiences of trafficked women who return to Nepal. It is anticipated that this information will help improve services for women who are returning to their communities. If you wish to receive a report on the findings of the study, this can be arranged with your case worker. In recognition of the time you have given for this study, you will receive an honorary payment of 200 Nepalese Rupees. Any transport costs associated with getting to the interview will be paid for by the researcher.

If you would like to participate in an interview with the researcher, you will need to sign the attached consent form or give your verbal consent to participating in the study. Even if you sign this form or give your verbal consent, you can withdraw from the study at any time with no questions asked.

This study has been cleared by one of the human research ethics committees of the University of Queensland in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s guidelines. You are, of course, free to discuss your participation in this study with the researcher, Jyoti Sharma, who is contactable on 00977 1 4276761 in Nepal or 0061 7 38703085 in Brisbane, Australia. If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact the Ethics Officer on 0061 7 3365 3924. You are also free to discuss your participation in this study with project supervisor, Dr Gai Harrison, on 0061 7 33653343.

Thank you

Jyoti Sharma

School of Social Work and Human Services

University of Queensland

Brisbane, QLD, 4072

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Appendix III: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

School of Social Work and Human Services
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DEPUTY HEAD OF SCHOOL
Associate Professor Andrew Jones

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Facsimile +61 7 3381 1523
Email bhumanservices@uq.edu.au
Internet www.uq.edu.au/swahs
CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

Sex trafficking in Nepal: Women's experiences of reintegration

I would like to take part in the research Sex Trafficking in Nepal: Women’s Experiences of Reintegration. By signing this form or verbally giving consent, I consent to participate in an interview with Ms Jyoti Sharma, a PhD student from the School of Social Work and Human Services, the University of Queensland, Australia and acknowledge that

- I have received either verbal or written information about the research and understand what is required of me
- I may ask any further questions about the research at any time.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and that I have the right to refuse to answer any question and terminate the interview at any time.
- I understand that participating in the study will not be of any personal benefit to me.
- I understand that our conversation will be audio-recorded and that a copy of the interview transcript or tape can be made available to me if requested.
- I understand that all identifying information will be removed from the interview transcript and that I will only identified by a pseudonym of my choosing.
- I understand that all interview material will be kept in a securely locked filing cabinet and that the researcher will be the only person who has access to this material.

I understand that none of the information that I provide will be described or portrayed in any way that will identify me in any report on the study.

Participant Name: ______________________________________

Participant Signature: ____________________________________

Date: _________________________________________________

Witness Name: _________________________________________

Witness Signature: _____________________________________

Date: _____________________
Appendix IV: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET IN NEPALI

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Internet www.uq.edu.au/swahs
CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

परिविघ्न ‘क’

सहभागीकोलागि जानकारी पत्र

“बौद्धिक निर्धारणमा परेक महिलाहरूको पारिवारिक तथा सामुदायिक पुनःमिलन -पुनःआगमन प्रतिको अनुभव”

तस उल्लिखित प्रश्नहरू र निम्नमा समाख्याति उल्लेखिनी तपाईलाई यस अवसरले बारे जानकारी दिनेको छ। साथै तपाईलाई अवसरमा समावेश हुने बारे निर्देश गर्न सहयोग प्राप्त हुनेछ।

यो क्षेत्र कै बारेमा हो?

नेपालको भाषामा देखि व्यक्तिको बौद्धिक निर्धारणमा अद्वितीय गरिएको छ। यसलाई तपाईलाई बौद्धिक निर्धारणमा पारिवारिक तथा सामुदायिक पुनःमिलन र पुनःआगमनको अनुभव हुने भएको छ।

हाल सबै अवसरलाई महिलाहरूको अनुभव, विचार, ज्ञान पश्चात जेलिको बेठी भेटी बौद्धिक निर्धारणको कार्यक्रम गर्न सक्छिन्। तपाईलाई महिलाहरूको सफल जितन निर्माणलाई सहायक हुनेछ।

यस क्षेत्रका क्षेत्रीय क्षेत्र कै हो?

मेरो नाम ज्योति शांत हो। म क्रीम्स्टार्ट विश्वविद्यालय, अंटर्नेशनल बौद्धिक संघ र बौद्धिक संघ विश्वविद्यालय, विश्वविद्यालय तथा धर्मता अनुभवको भौगोलिक तथा सामाजिक अनुभव सम्मूचो देखि उल्लेखित गरिएको छ। मेरी दरबारी बौद्धिक निर्धारणको पारिवा तथा सामुदायिक प्रतिको अनुभव हुन्छ।

बौद्धिक निर्धारणको ज्ञान र सहभागीहरूको क्षेत्रीय भूमिका रहने छ?

यस अवसरलाई। सहभागीहरूको ज्ञान र सहभागीहरूको क्षेत्रीय भूमिका रहने छ।

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215
परिलल्ल ‘क’ सहभागी स्वीकृति फार्म

"बेच बिक्रीमा परेका महिलाहरूको पारिवारिक तथा सामुदायिक पनीमिलन-पुनरागमन प्रक्षेपको अनुमति"

म यस अध्ययन "बेचबिक्रीमा परेका महिलाहरूको पारिवारिक तथा सामुदायिक पनीमिलन-पुनरागमन प्रक्षेपको अनुमति" मा सहभागी हुन इच्छुक छ। यस फार्मामा लिखित स्वीकृति प्रदान गर्न अथवा मौखिक स्वीकृति दिए म अध्ययनकर्ता योग्य शर्त जो हो न्यूयोर्क विश्वविद्यालयको सामाजिक तथा मानवीय सेवा विभागमा विद्यार्थीहरू तहमा अध्ययनरत छन्, उनी संग अन्वेषण निर्धारण दिन र तपाईले यसलाई पढ्न भएका हुनुहोस्।

- मैले यस अध्ययनको बारेमा लिखित अथवा मौखिक विवरण प्राप्त गरेका छैन। यसले मा अन्य रोचक विषयक तथ्य भएका हुन छ।
- मैले यस अध्ययनको सहभागीता स्वीकृतको हो। मैले यसले यसले तपाईले अधिकार राख्नुहुन्छ र कृपया पालन समयमा अन्वेषण भएका हुन जसलाई स्वीकृत गर्न सक्नुहुन्छ।
- मैले यस अध्ययनको सहभागीता भएको सामाजिक अधिकार अभिलाषा फाइडा हुने भएका हुन छ। मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ।
- मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ र मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ। यस अध्ययनको सहभागीता स्वीकृतको हो। मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ।
- मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ र मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ। मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ।
- मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ।
- मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ।
- मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ।
- मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ। यसले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ।
- मैले यसको ध्यान दिनुहुन्छ।

सहभागीको नाम: __________________________

सहभागीको सही: __________________________

मिति: __________________________

साखिको नाम: __________________________

साखिको सही: __________________________

मिति: __________________________
Appendix VI: GATE KEEPER APPROVAL FROM THE ORGANISATIONS

Shakti Samuha

Reg. No.: 944/056/05

Date: 27th September 09

Dear Jyoti Sharma,

Re: PhD study – Sex trafficking in Nepal: Women’s experience of reintegration

Thank you for requesting the participation of our organization, Shakti Samuha, in your PhD study. We are happy to confirm the involvement of Shakti Samuha in your proposed study and to assist you in recruiting participants for the purpose of an interview. We understand that our role will be to inform Women who have used our service and who have returned to their community about your study and, with their agreement, introduce them to you for the purposes of an interview about their experience of reintegration. We understand that every effort will be taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of our service’s staff and clients and that you will respect the wishes of women who do not wish to talk to you.

We believe the results of the study may help improve services for women who are returning to their communities.

We look forward to working with you on the research project in due course.

Yours sincerely,

[signature]
Chari Maya Tamang
Chairperson

Shakti Samuha
Post Box No.: 19488
Gaurighat-7, Katmandu
Email: shakti@samuha.wlink.com.np
Website: www.shaktsamuha.org

Phone: 4494815
Dear Ms Jyoti Sharma

Re: PhD Study - Sex trafficking in Nepal: Women's experiences of reintegration

Thank you for requesting the participation of our organisation "Maiti Nepal" in your PhD study. We are happy to confirm the involvement of Maiti Nepal in your proposed study and to assist you in recruiting participants for the purpose of an interview.

We understand as per Maiti Nepal's code of conduct every effort will be taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of our service's staff and clients and that you will respect the wishes of women who do not wish to talk to you.

We believe the results of the study may help improve services for women who are returning to their communities.

We look forward to working with you on the research project in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Ms. Sumitra Shrestha
Shelter Incharge
Date 17.4.2009

Dear Ms Sharma

Re: PhD Study - Sex trafficking in Nepal: Women’s experiences of reintegration

Thank you for requesting the participation of our organisation, ABC-Nepal (Agro-forestry Basic Health and Cooperative), in your PhD study. We are happy to confirm the involvement of ABC-Nepal (Agro-forestry Basic Health and Cooperative) in your proposed study and to assist you in recruiting participants for the purpose of an interview. Once you return to Nepal we will arrange a meeting with you to discuss the recruitment process in more detail. We understand that our role will be to inform women who have used our service and who have returned to their community about your study and, with their agreement, introduce them to you for the purposes of an interview about their experience of reintegration. We understand that every effort will be taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of our service’s staff and clients and that you will respect the wishes of women who do not wish to talk to you.

We believe the results of the study may help improve services for women who are returning to their communities.

We look forward to working with you on the research project in due course.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Durga Ghimire
President
# Appendix VII: NODE STRUCTURE

## Sex trafficking in Nepal women's experience of reintegration

5/10/2014 9:55 PM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hierarchical Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Node</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction and habit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers of reintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caste issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to live in city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumstances before trafficking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin, fate and karma</td>
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<td>Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current job and work</td>
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<td>Demand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Different view R1- R20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration\Duration of stay in rehabilitation centre in Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration\Duration of stay in transit home in India</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duration\Living in Nepal since return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration\Time spent is brothel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education\Level of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education\View regarding education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity\Language background</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience of trafficking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience of brothel\Exploitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience of brothel\Positive aspects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience at the time of rescue</td>
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Experience of return
Factors influencing successful reintegration
Family
Family\Family background
Family\Family contact
Family\Experience of returning to family
Fear
Friends
Frustration
Frustration\community
Frustration\family
Frustration\organisation
Frustration\self
Frustration\Government
Future plan
Gender issue
Gharwalli and the environment of brothel
Hiding
HIV
Hope
Independency
Job related experience
Land and property
Marital status
Marital status\Before trafficking
Marital status\Number of children
Marital status\Unmatched marriage
Marital status\View regarding marriage
Moment of happiness
Money
Motivation factors on repatriation and reintegration
Movement of trafficking
Movement of trafficking\Attempted place of reintegration
Movement of trafficking\Current place of living
Movement of trafficking\District of origin
Movement of trafficking\Trafficked city
ONGOEXREIN
ONGOEXREIN\Stigma
Ongoing effect of trafficking\Health
Ongoing effect of trafficking\Social exclusion and isolation
Ongoing livelihood
Ongoing livelihood\Village women
Ongoing livelihood
Women living in rehabilitation centre

Ongoing livelihood
Women living independently in city

Positive experience

Reason behind trafficking

Rehabilitation centre

Reintegration strategies

Reintegration\Barriers of reintegration\Cultural

Reintegration\Barriers of reintegration\Economic

Reintegration\Barriers of reintegration\Health

Reintegration\Barriers of reintegration\Personal

Reintegration\Barriers of reintegration\Political

Reintegration\Barriers of reintegration\Psychological

Reintegration\Barriers of reintegration\Social

Reintegration\Coping strategies

Reintegration\Supportive factors on reintegration\Family support

Reintegration\Supportive factors on reintegration\Family support\Supportive husband

Reintegration\Supportive factors on reintegration\Family support\Supportive parents and siblings

Reintegration\Supportive factors on reintegration\Services provided by anti-trafficking organisations

Reintegration\Supportive factors on reintegration\Services provided by anti-trafficking organisations\Employment

Reintegration\Supportive factors on reintegration\Services provided by anti-trafficking organisations\Health check-up and medical support

Reintegration\Supportive factors on reintegration\Services provided by anti-trafficking organisations\Legal support

Reintegration\Supportive factors on reintegration\Services provided by anti-trafficking organisations\Support during rescue, repatriation and reintegration

Reintegration\Supportive factors on reintegration\Services provided by anti-trafficking organisations\Trainings

Releasing mode

Repatriation

Sources of information

Suggestions

Trafficker

Trafficker’s tricks

Trafficking mode

Trafficking mode\Abducted by a stranger

Trafficking mode\Abducted by a known person

Trafficking mode\Betrayed by a close family member

Trafficking mode\Betrayed by a friend

Trafficking mode\Betrayed by work colleagues

Trafficking mode\Lured for better employment

Trauma

Uncertainty

Unstable living condition
THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
Institutional Approval Form For Experiments On Humans
Including Behavioural Research

<table>
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<th>Chief Investigator:</th>
<th>Ms Jyoti Sharma</th>
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<td>Sex Trafficking In Nepal: Women's Experiences Of Reintegration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisor:</td>
<td>Dr Gai Harrison, Dr Deborah Susan Setterlund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Investigator(s):</td>
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<td>Department(s):</td>
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**Comments:**

**Name of responsible Committee:-**
Behavioural & Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee
This project complies with the provisions contained in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and complies with the regulations governing experimentation on humans.

**Name of Ethics Committee representative:-**
Dr Jack Broere
Chairperson
Behavioural & Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee

Date 26/05/09  
Signature