

How we help modern slaves

Written by Doreen Gaura

Tuesday, 24 July 2012 16:04 - Last Updated Tuesday, 24 July 2012 16:24

Earlier in the month, journalist for The Star newspaper, Noor-Jehan Yoro Badat, interviewed our social worker, Shireen Pekeur for an in-depth article she was writing on the issue of human trafficking in South Africa. You can find below the section of the article where Pekeur makes comment on our work and experiences with trafficking victims. To read the full article titled [How We Help Modern Slaves](#) please click on link.

‘The most vulnerable are those exploited,’ says Shireen Pekeur

As a trained social worker, when I see a victim, I know what to do. You get taught to not let your personal feelings interfere.

You try not let the history of someone’s life affect you.

I’m fairly new to our victim assistance programme, and I’ve worked on very few trafficking cases. The one that stays with me is the girl who came from the Northern Cape.

At the age of 16, she was brought down to Cape Town by a man who recruited women for domestic work.

As a domestic worker, it seemed like she had good working conditions, but her employer’s husband continually harassed her sexually and finally raped her.

What saddened me was that she was an innocent and very gullible.

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It angers me that it's those who are most vulnerable who are exploited. And they're brought from other places with the hope of a better life. You feel helpless. You can only put a bandage on a wound.

Because these girls often don't have family, they get sent back to where they came from, which is often a poverty-stricken environment.

There's no support system for them, no jobs, so some will return.

Family is an important link to repatriation. Just the fact that you can speak to families, and they're not going to reject these girls, it's encouraging for them.

It was a reward for me to know that the girl we sent back to the Northern Cape was happy.

The social worker was also happy with my work, that I gave this girl a sense of dignity.

You know, success for me would be if she found a job, but resources in the rural areas of the Northern Cape are limited.

There are few social workers who specialise in human trafficking. Our case loads are high. It sometimes feels like we just put out the flames.

Social workers are basically dealing with the surface layer but are not digging deeper to find out what happens, and to walk a road with that person. And that person can fall through the cracks.

It's stressful finding the shelters for these women and children. You don't want to allow them to become victims of the system again.

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Pekeur is a social worker for Activists Networking against the Exploitation of Children (ANEX) in Cape Town.