SOAR as an Effective Community-based Response in Anti-Trafficking Movements

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in the narratives of women from rural communities who were forced to migrate to Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, and later India, this paper critically examines the meaningful involvement of trafficking survivors for sexual exploitation in anti-trafficking movement in Nepal. Using the SOAR (Stop, Observe, Ask, and Respond) model, this paper explores the community-based responses to address the issues of human trafficking and post-trafficking. This paper is guided by migratory and intersectionality frameworks. Using the frameworks, Participatory Action Research (PAR), a transformative and an empowerment methodology, was conducted with eight female trafficking survivors who were exploited for sexual exploitation. PAR was used to critically understand intersectional gender oppression escalated the vulnerability of women to trafficking and made the women "doubly victimized" in their post trafficking. Through engaging in the study process, PAR allowed survivors to critically understand their own oppression and develop strategies to effectively act towards ending forced migration and trafficking. Using a thematic analysis, the collected information was categorized, and coded. The research team included the researcher and the trafficking survivors, who are recognized as "co-researchers" in this paper, identified and used a wide range of pragmatic approaches and tools such as street dramas, interactive sessions, peer interviews and meetings with political leaders. These approaches provided the survivors with an opportunity not only to share their voices and experiences on migration and trafficking, but also to highlight transformative impacts, including personal and social transformation.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

Grounded in the narratives of Nepali survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation who were forced to migrate to Kathmandu, from different rural areas in Nepal, and later to India, this paper critically examines the meaningful involvement of sex trafficking survivors in anti-trafficking movements in Nepal. Using the SOAR ("stop, observe, ask, and respond") model, this paper examines the community-led transformative responses to address the issues of human trafficking and post-trafficking. Participatory Action Research (PAR), a transformative and an empowerment methodology, was conducted with eight female trafficking survivors to critically understand intersectional gender oppression escalated the vulnerability of women to trafficking and made them "doubly victimized" in their post trafficking. PAR allowed survivors to critically understand their own oppression, develop strategies to effectively act towards ending forced migration and trafficking. Using a

wide range of advocacy tools, such as street dramas and interactive sessions with communities, the survivors were involved in promoting personal and social transformation.

For the purpose of this paper, this article is structured in five sections: (1) migration and trafficking, (2) theoretical frameworks, (3) PAR as a transformative process, (4) the SOAR model and its applications; and (5) lessons learned and moving forward. The terms "survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation," "trafficking survivors" and "women" are used interchangeably throughout this paper. Human trafficking occurs in a number of sectors including agriculture, entertainment, forced labour, removal of organs, and sexual exploitation, however, for the purpose of this study, this article solely focuses on sex trafficking.

Migration and Human Trafficking

Women and children are forced to migrate at both domestic and international levels for a variety of reasons, including sexual and labour exploitations. One of the most common reasons people migrate is searching for an opportunity to improve their socioeconomic status through education and/or employment. The trend of migrating to Kathmandu and even outside of Nepal to countries such as India, Korea, and Qatar and other Middle Eastern countries, has significantly increased in an effort to avoid political and violent conflicts (the Maoist insurgency). The Central Bureau of Statistics reported that in 2011 at least one-third of all Nepali households have at least one family member living abroad for employment or education (Aitchison, He, Hussey & Wei 2018). During the Maoist conflict, each time there was a change in government, or a state of emergency was declared, out-migration increased by 29% the following month (Williams & Meeta, 2008). With regard to violence, the same study found that "each major gun battle in a month increased the odds of out migration in the following month by 15%" (p. 14).

Another reason for migrating is directly related to environmental issues such as the earthquakes of April 2015. The study argued that the earthquakes resulted in extensive displacement and migration (Abilio et al., 2019). The National Society for Earthquake Technology-Nepal reported that "35 out of 75 districts were affected and 600,000 houses were completely destroyed." As a result, 2.6 million people were displaced from their homes (Aitchison, He, Hussey, & Wei, 2018). The World Economic Forum's *Global Risks Report 2016* concluded that "the most likely global risk perceived during the year 2016 is large-scale involuntary migration, forced migration caused by violence, conflicts, environmental, and/or economic reasons" (Yousaf, 2018).Yousaf (2018) argued that "larger global structures create conditions of vulnerability, [leading] people [to] migrate following violent conflicts, political and economic distress, natural disasters, and other unstable conditions" (p. 210).

A number of studies claimed that poverty is a major factor in increasing women's and children's vulnerability to migration and trafficking (Bales 2007a; Cameron and Newman 2008; Chaulagai 2009; Dhungel 2017; Farr 2004; Ford, Lyons, & van Schendel 2012; Jac-Kucharski 2012; Presenti & Rao 2012; Mishra 2015; Outshoorn 2015; Skeldon 2002; Truong 2003; Zhang 2007). Hupp Williamson (2019) confirmed that risky "migration decisions and economic based disparities such as poverty and blocked job or educational opportunities are consistently linked to human trafficking (p.14)." The study also reported that "because many contributing factors are shared between the two phenomena, the line between migration and human trafficking is not always distinct and is often blurred" (p. 14). As rural-to-urban migration increased in the 1980s and 1990s and carpet factories (a predominant source of urban employment in Nepal) started closing in the late 1990s, many women and children were transported across the border and urged to get involved in sex work to provide their families with food and clothing. In 2002, after the Government of Nepal prohibited bonded labour in domestic work, agriculture and brick kilns, people who were freed from bonded labour became involved in commercial sexual activities as they had no homes or other resources to support their families after they were freed (Frederick & Basnyat, 2010).The global risk of migration associated with violence can be seen in Nepal in the form of the armed conflict between the Maoist forces in Nepal and the Government of Nepal from 1996 to 2006, a conflict which resulted in large-scale displacement and forced hundreds of thousands of Nepalese women and children to flee from their homes (Cameron & Newman, 2008; Singh, Sharma, Poudel & Jimba,

2007; Sharma, 2014; Upadhyay, 2011). Women who had left their homes in search of security and a better quality of life were often forcibly sold either to Indian brothels or to other countries, including Dubai and Qatar, as hotel and factory workers (McNeill, 2008; National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, 2008; Subedi, 2009).

The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (2000) defined human trafficking as:

> …the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbourings or receipt of person, by means of 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 giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purposes of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation or 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. (p. 2)

Similarly, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (2000) defines trafficking as "the moving, selling or buying of women and children for prostitution within and outside a country for monetary or other considerations with or without the consent of the person subjected to trafficking" (p. 51). This official definition of trafficking has facilitated each nation in South Asia to develop plans, policies and approaches as means to curb trafficking.

Theoretical Frameworks

Migration Theories

This section offers a brief review of the migration theories that guided this transformative study. Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana (2016) suggested that migration can be based in "economic, social, legal, political, cultural, ethnic or other phenomena" (p. 21). Human trafficking shares many similarities with migration and can be considered a form of forced migration. Chaung (2006) shared that "more often than not, trafficking is labor migration gone horribly wrong in our globalized economy" (p. 138). The neoclassical economics theory of migration is a foundational theory that directly links migration to a geographical imbalance between the supply of and demand for labour (Wickramasinghe &Wimalaratana, 2016). This theory has an individualistic focus, wherein people are said to mobilize in order to "maximize lifetime earnings" (Massey, 2015, p.4). Coppola (2018) argued that "according to the neo-classical (or push-pull) model and the family strategy model, people move if a cost-benefit analysis points to gains from migration" (p. 2).

Puricelli (2017) noted that push factors originating in sending countries include challenges for citizens such as poverty, unemployment and social and political constraints, while pull factors originating in receiving countries include improved income and employment opportunities, high- quality living conditions and political freedoms which facilitate and enhance a good-quality life. In El Salvador, Mexico and South Korea, some of the common push factors for women include unequal property rights, lack of political influence, machismo and Confucian cultural practices and lack of rights over reproductive health (Moxley & Noyori-Corbett, 2016). The same study elaborates how these factors impact women, suggesting that push factors include not only the lack of economic opportunities but also the lack of protection of women's rights (2016). Those factors are linked to human trafficking through "[gender] based inequality, including discrimination and violence which indeed increases human trafficking (Chuang 2006; Corrin 2005; Farr 2004; Hupp Williamson, 2019; Kara 2010; Lee 2011; Limoncelli 2009). Overall, the lack of economic and social rights and opportunities such as property rights, educational access, and political participation facilitate the trafficking of women and girls both locally and internationally (Hupp Williamson, 2019; Shelley 2010).

In the context of Nepal, Sarkar (2019) claimed that "migration involves a deep-rooted process of gender discrimination, lack of female education, ignorance of rural folk, poverty, and lack of economic opportunities"

3

(2016, p. 436). Gurung and Kachchhap (2016) report that factors causing sex trafficking in Nepal include the lack of education, extreme poverty, unemployment, gender discrimination, political crisis, natural calamity, and the open border (2016). Alvord et al. (2018) described the impact poverty has on human [trafficking,] noting that in their study "service providers indicated the importance of poverty pushing people from positions of vulnerability to extreme exploitation" (p. 122). Dhungel (2017) argued that intersectional gender oppression is one of the predominant factors in the victimization of women in trafficking.

Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality is hardly new in academia, including teaching, research, and practice, although the term" intersectionality" was coined by the feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. The term was used for the first time to describe "the exclusion of Black women in White feminist discourse and antiracist discourse (Bowleg, 2012). Intersectionality is a theoretical framework envisioning that multiple social categories, including race, ethnicity, age, caste, class, gender, sexual orientation, "intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect multiple interlocking systems of privilege and oppression at the macro, social-structural level (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism)" (Bowleg, 2012, 1267). The two terms "social locations" and "intersectionality" are used interchangeably in social work education. Based on some intersectionality scholars' arguments, Hulko (2009) claimed that "Social location refers to the relative amount of privilege and oppression that individuals possess on the basis of specific identity constructs, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and faith. The metaphor of intersectionality has been used to describe the entanglement of identity categories that make up an individual, the differential attributions of power that result from such varied configurations, and the need to view intersectional beings holistically rather than try to tease apart different strands of identity (p. 48). In social work education, commitment to community and social change through engaging with multiple historically oppressed communities form intersectionality lenses is incredibly essential. Therefore, in collaboration with trafficking survivors for sexual exploitation, this study critically examines the collective voices of their challenges in post trafficking from intersectionality paradigms and discuss how women became involved in anti-trafficking movement through PAR.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) as Transformative Process

This section will briefly introduce PAR and its implementation in this particular study. The process of the study and its progression will also be highlighted in this section as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: This diagram speaks to the study process

In collaboration with Shakti Samuha, Kathmandu, PAR, a transformative research approach, was conducted with eight survivors of sex trafficking to collectively identify the gender intersectional oppression of trafficking and post-trafficking as well as to address the challenges identified through engaging in community-led transformative approaches. PAR is rooted in the adult education movements of Latin America and the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (Fals Borda, 1988; Levine &Yeich, 1992), which provides participants with opportunities to critically understand their own intersectional oppression and to promote social action (Lorenzetti & Dhungel, 2020). Action research is the way in which groups of people can organize the conditions under which they can learn from their own experience and make this experience accessible to others. PAR's underlying value is that people are not "objects" to be studied but "subjects" to be allied with. Conventional research often treats people as objectified research units, recognizing at best mere tokens of subjectivity. PAR's unique stance is to research "with" and "by" rather than "for". The PAR approach means to break down the power structure (subtle or overt) between researchers and participants.

This study began with formal meetings among the researcher and the leadership team working with Shakti Samuha, an organization working in anti-trafficking movement, wherein the researcher explained them about the nature of PAR and its process and outcomes. Subsequently, the researcher was invited to meet with some potential participants and talk about the study. During the meeting, the author helped the group understand PAR, its process, and possible outcomes (personal and social transformation). This meeting made the women excited about their roles and their involvement in the new concept of research, especially when they learned that this study would allow them to do research on their own lives. Upon receiving the consent forms from the women, the study began with community engagement and relationships building between the research team and the researcher, through using a number of ice breaking exercises. Once the building relationship process progressed, the women themselves started conversations about human trafficking that resulted in the women got involved in discussing and identifying the issues of human trafficking and their challenges in post trafficking. In recognizing that not everyone was meaningfully involved in the critical dialogues/discussions, the author again started the study process with a focus on relationship building among the researcher team. Therefore, the author started relationship building process through meeting with women in an individual setting,

5

outside of the group meetings. This process helped to build the confidence of women that led them to meaningfully and actively involved in the research. For example, the women did not only talk about their issues of human trafficking and the challenges in their reintegration, but they also developed some key strategies to address the identified issues and acted upon them as projected in Figure 2 below. Then, the research team celebrated the completion of the study wherein each individual shared their research experiences with focuses on personal and social transformative impacts achieved during the study period.

Overall, this study provided the eight trafficking survivors with an opportunity to come together on a common platform and construct knowledge. This process helped them understand their own gender oppression through praxis, action-reflection-action. Grounded in praxis, as the study progressed, the women were involved not only in identifying issues making women vulnerable to trafficking and developing some strategies to address the issues of human trafficking but also in anti-trafficking interventions through engaging in performative actions. Using the SOAR model as reflected in Figure 2, the subsequent section examines the involvement of the survivors of trafficking in responding to the issues and challenges of human trafficking and post-trafficking.

Stop Observe Ask Respond Model (SOAR) Model and applications

SOAR is a training model originally developed in 2014 as a pilot program by the Health Care and Human Services Administration for Children and Families and the Office on Women's Health for Health Care Providers in the United States (https://wrphtc.arizona.edu/news/stop-observe-ask-respond-soar-human-trafficking-training). The SOAR framework was created in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, subject matter experts, and survivors of human trafficking to support a public health approach to trafficking. It provides a simple way for professionals in health care and social service settings to remember how to help individuals who may have experienced trafficking. While the SOAR model was introduced as a training model to fight for human trafficking in the USA, using the SOAR model, this paper illustrates that trafficking survivors themselves became motivated and involved in anti-human trafficking movement. Figure 2 illustrates the SOAR model, in particular women's involvement in responding to the issues of human trafficking and post-trafficking.
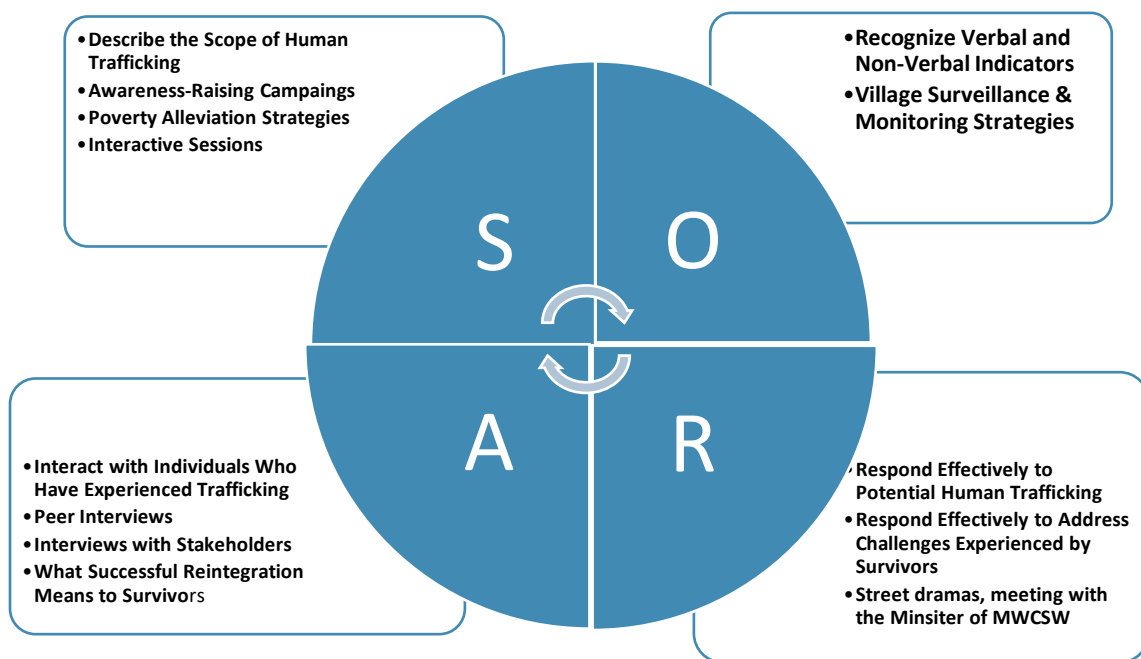

Figure 2: SOAR Model reflects the involvement of trafficking survivors in Anti-Trafficking Efforts

Stop

In recognizing the need to understand the scope and contributing factors of human trafficking, the first step of SOAR suggests that public health professionals and agencies working in anti-trafficking interventions are required to act in such way that their work contributes to stopping human trafficking (https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/training/soar-health-and-wellness-training). In Nepal, in collaboration with international and local agencies, the Government of Nepal has been involved in developing strategies not only to fight against human trafficking but also to address the needs of survivors of trafficking, especially in employment opportunities and minimizing stigmatization through the use of the "3Ps" (prevention, protection and prosecution) approach. While discussing a preventive approach such as awareness-raising campaigns and poverty alleviation strategies, the trafficking survivors first engaged in critical dialogues and conversations about socio-political environment of Nepal and socially constructed root causes of human trafficking, and later they interviewed some key stakeholders working in anti-trafficking efforts such as police officers, practitioners and policymakers to gain a better understanding of those individuals' perspectives on current approaches to preventive measures and to identify gaps in programs and services. Through action-reflection-action, the women subsequently developed some key strategies for awareness-raising campaigns which include interactive sessions with the community at large and poster distributions to at-risk communities. For example, the research team facilitated two interactive sessions at local schools in Bardiya District, a high-risk district in the Far-Western Region of Nepal, with teachers, staff, the local media, local political leaders, police officers, and parents. During the sessions, the survivors highlighted certain structural issues of human trafficking and invited the community at large to come forward as allies and support them in anti-trafficking movements.

Observe

The second phase of SOAR encourages professionals to identify individual and environmental indicators of trafficking and trained them to recognize the verbal and non-verbal indicators of human trafficking. (https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/training/soar-health-and-wellness-training). This stage centers on identifying potential victims of trafficking through interception and surveillance approaches. Interception transit-monitoring strategies and vigilance surveillance are two very successful anti-trafficking tools in Nepal. According to Hudlow (2015) ,"transit monitoring is conceptualized as distinct from both pre- and post-trafficking intervention strategies because it takes place at a time after trafficking has begun but before it has reached completion" (p. 277). In this method, the "intercepting agents mostly depend on their observation of the potential victim's movement" to guide them in deciding whether or not to stop and investigate women crossing the border (Chetry & Pandel, 2019, p. 127). Another community-level participatory preventive approach, village surveillance, has been initiated by groups of local people such as mothers' and women's groups in high-risk communities. These groups watch over women and girls belong to high-risk communities to protect them from trafficking. For example, if a stranger is seen talking to girls and women in these communities, village residents stop and interrogate that stranger, especially if he or she is caught leaving the community with women and girls. Additionally, some local organizations, such as Maiti Nepal and Shakti Samuha, have used a border-monitoring prevention strategy and deployed staff to monitor people crossing the southern borders into India (Adhikari, 2011; Chaulagai, 2009; Samarasinghe & Burton, 2007; Sharma, 2014). The applications of the methods were also shared with the larger communities through street dramas performed by the women which, as will be discussed later in this paper.

Ask

The ask phase of SOAR requires people working against trafficking to screen and identify individuals who may have experienced trafficking using a trauma-informed and person-centered approach. In Nepal, a number of quantitative and qualitative studies were conducted to understand the challenges of trafficking survivors. Local

organizations such as Shakti Samuha and Maiti Nepal have developed post-trafficking programs and services but the services are neither person-centered nor trauma-informed. To elaborate, during the study process, the survivors interviewed service providers to explore how they perceive reintegration and what programs and services are available for trafficking survivors. The indicators of successful reintegration from service provider perspectives included marriage, acceptance of families and communities and employment. ". The women also found that a number of protective measures such as counselling, meeting with survivors' families and vocational training are used to support survivors in the post-trafficking period. This approach, however, seems to be pre-designed and generalized under a one-size-fits-all model and does not adequately address the issue of reintegration (Adhikari, 2011; Bohl, 2010; Chaulagai, 2009; Dhungel, 2017; Sharma, 2014). For instance, those who want professional training, including nursing, health care and hotel management, as opposed to vocational training, such as sewing and knitting, are out of luck. The women claimed that, to them, reintegration means "to live with dignity and respect in workplace, home and communities" and defined reintegration as "the entitlement of a survivor to be included socially, culturally, politically and economically as well as to a welcoming, safe and an inclusive environment that provides a survivor the opportunity to enjoy her life free from double victimization, violence and ongoing stigma". The women further reported that it is critical for service providers to engage meaningfully with survivors to identify the supports they need and develop programs and services from person-centered and trauma-informed practice lenses.

Respond

The needs and aspirations of trafficking survivors are best addressed by the coordinated effort of multidisciplinary stakeholders to deliver appropriate services. The U.S. Department of Human Trafficking elaborates, claiming that the professional should respond "effectively to potential human trafficking within the community by identifying needs and available resources to provide critical support and assistance" (https://wrphtc.arizona.edu/news/stop-observe-ask-respond-soar-human-trafficking-training). As discussed earlier, after women had identified the root causes of human trafficking and the challenges that they face in their reintegration, they were involved in responding to those challenges by developing and engaging in community-led transformative actions such as street dramas and the drafting of a recommendation letter that was submitted to the Ministry of Women Children and Social Welfare.

In terms of responding to the identified challenges, the trafficking survivors developed a street drama entitled "Stories of Trafficking Survivors and their Resiliencies". The drama was developed based on the narratives they had discussed in group meetings. Later they decided on the roles for each individual and performed the drama in four different places to educate people about socio-political environment making women vulnerable to trafficking , as well as the intersectional gender oppression that the survivors of trafficking experience in reintegration both in and outside of Kathmandu (Lorenzetti & Dhungel, 2020, p. 45). Their audiences included academics, teachers, school and university students, policymakers, police officers and communities. The research team picked Bardiya District for the first performance as one of the survivors was from the district and the people from Bardiya had discriminated and exhibited micro-aggressive behaviours against her after she had returned to Nepal. After the performances, evaluation surveys were distributed to discover whether or not the dramas had been helpful in educating the spectators about issues related to trafficking and post-trafficking. The results revealed that the street dramas were indeed a very effective and engaging awareness-raising tool that promoted transformation at both the individual and the societal levels.

Subsequently, the women met the Minster of the Ministry of Women Children and Social Welfare and submitted a letter making recommendations about the roles of the Government of Nepal could assume in curbing human trafficking and addressing post-trafficking challenges. The letter features strategies for engaging with the trafficking survivors in developing anti-trafficking and post-trafficking policies, programs and services.

Lessons Learned/Moving Forward

In collaboration with the Government of Nepal, a large number of international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and Save the Children as well as local organizations such as Gramin Mahila Srijanshil Pariwar (GMSP) Nepal, Alliance against Trafficking in Nepal, Shakti Samuha and Maiti Nepal are currently involved in promoting safe migration and supporting trafficking survivors. This study is evidence of the importance of involvement of survivors in the anti-trafficking movement. Indeed, women survivors are the "experts" about their own lives, and they are the one who can bring a "real life" perspective to the anti-trafficking movement and help communities to critically understand the issues of human trafficking and the roles they can play in addressing the issues identified.

Therefore, in moving forward, it is critically important to invite survivors to contribute to anti- and post-trafficking policy and program development as well as participate in community-based studies in a way that makes them feel valued, respected, and heard. The trafficking survivors clearly demonstrated that "trafficking survivors are no longer clients" and therefore shifting the paradigm "survivors are beneficiaries" to the paradigm "survivors are the agents of change" is needed while working with them. Survivors are always seeking for collaborative opportunities and safe platforms to learn and grow and, with communal support, can do so. In recognizing the importance of involving the survivors in responding to the issues of human trafficking and post-trafficking, this paper speaks to the power, ability and knowledge of survivors to promote communal and transformative changes. To sum up, while considering preventive and protective measures and the SOAR model, the anti-trafficking movement should focus on pragmatic approaches, community-led transformative research and trauma-informed practice.

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