



**Embargoed until 11am Wednesday 18 August 2010**

**Response from Eaves Poppy Project re Project Acumen trafficking research**

We are grateful to Project Acumen for undertaking research into the complex and difficult issue of trafficking, and are not at all surprised that the report found such a significant *minimum* number of victims of sex trafficking in England and Wales.

The report – which was a snapshot of sex trafficking in the UK – found a minimum of 2,600 victims of sex trafficking in England and Wales during the research period. Even though we believe that sex trafficking figures are much higher, for the reasons stated below, we would also like to highlight the fact this is a very significant number.

We would also like to highlight several concerns around the methodology and nature of the research itself – some of which were also raised by the authors themselves – which we believe significantly lower the numbers of trafficked women found by this research.

These concerns were raised by Eaves personnel during the research in our capacity as advisors to the project.

**Concerns**

- The report was a snapshot of the trafficking situation in England and Wales in a given period. Given that trafficking is intrinsically linked to constant movement, a snapshot study is never going to give a complete picture.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) categorises victims of trafficking according to a decontextualised weighting (priority) system of indicators. While we do use the ILO indicators at the Poppy Project, we believe that the threshold of indicators required by the ILO to be classified as a victim of trafficking are overly prescriptive and may prevent some persons who encounter victims of trafficking from properly identifying them.

Consequently, we believe that a high number of those women classified as “vulnerable” but not “trafficked” according to this report would have been classified as trafficked by Poppy and accepted onto

the project for support.

We also would like to highlight the fact that taking women's experiences out of context can also skew results. For example, women from countries where violence is widespread might deem any violence experienced not significant enough to disclose, despite this being a strong indicator according to the ILO.

Every one of the strong indicators alone would certainly be enough for Poppy as well as the UK's criminal justice system to express serious concern for the wellbeing of a woman and to investigate any possibility of trafficking. Additionally, many of the medium indicators and several of the weak ones would in fact be classified by Poppy as strong indicators.

- Many of the strong indicators, such as rape, are not as easy to disclose, especially if a woman comes from a country where there is a huge stigma attached to sexual violence. Many victims of trafficking feel ashamed of or responsible for their situations, and identifying these victims of trafficking requires patience and thorough expert assessment, which cannot be distilled into a list of indicators.

Women will very often disclose a number of weaker indicators rather than the one strong indicator which will immediately warrant her full categorisation as trafficked.

- Researchers were unable to locate many victims of trafficking from certain groups of women, such as those from countries throughout Africa, despite the fact that numbers from those countries are proliferating (as demonstrated by the high number of referrals received by support services, including Poppy). The report also did not look for trafficked women in places where they can be more easily found – for example the Criminal Justice System (prisons, detention centres). Poppy's Outreach Service works with almost three times as many victims of trafficking as Poppy's Acute Service, and the majority of these are from the CJS or detentions centres.
- A methodology which involves researchers entering brothels, in their capacity as police officers, and asking women if they had been trafficked, potentially in full hearing of the brothel management, is unlikely to glean accurate information from all women encountered or contribute towards an accurate figure. It has been well documented that women find it hard to disclose experiences of trafficking, particularly when in the controlling environment of a brothel and especially to police or figures of authority.

Comments attributable to Poppy Project national coordinator Abigail Stepnitz

– ENDS –

### **Notes to editors**

Please call communications manager Anna Bowden on 020 7840 7126 for further information about the issue or Eaves' work.