

Study finds trafficked women need more support

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(Medical Xpress)—A study has found that trafficked women in the Greater Sydney region lacked access to a breadth of health and community services, as there was a national focus on border protection and criminalisation rather than human rights.

The collaborative study between The University of Queensland (UQ) and The University of Sydney involved interviews with key informants from NGOs and government organisations and policy analysis from 2007 to 2012.

The study found services for trafficked women have been sparse, uncoordinated and poorly funded.

Co-researcher, Associate Professor Julie Hepworth of UQ's Centre for [Primary Health Care](#) Research, said the biggest obstacles have been the focus on border protection and the criminalisation of trafficking of people into Australia.

Associate Professor Hepworth said the main government service provision, at the time this study was conducted, made services available to individuals who were willing to co-operate with the Australian Federal Police in their investigations of allegations of trafficking but that has improved and since 2009 cooperation is no longer a condition to receive services.

She said the service primary goal was to pursue and convict the

trafficker.

"Individuals who did co-operate, however, were at risk themselves of being charged with immigration violations and NGOs reported women feared they would be held in detention centres and/or deported," Associate Professor Hepworth said.

"These women are fearful of accessing services because of immigration violations and disclosure of their identity in Australia and in their home countries.

"The Government approach is to develop services to help woman be reintegrated back in their country – but a major need is trauma counseling.

"Government services tend to be more focused on [border protection](#) rather than human rights, where NGO services viewed these women as having a range of health and support needs and tried to meet these with few resources."

Associate Professor Hepworth said government services needed to better co-ordinate with NGOs in providing trauma counseling, dental care, a full range of health services and an improvement in service provision for these women.

"There needs to be increased understanding as to how the women became trafficked to begin with," she said.

"Many have been forced or tricked into being trafficked in the sex industry from a young age and have no knowledge of anything else.

"They also fear deportation because they face being ostracized by their home communities."

Associate Professor Hepworth said about 1-2000 women mostly from Asia were trafficked in Australia every year and largely worked within Melbourne and Sydney's sex industry.

The study involved the views from medical organisations, a law enforcement agent, sexual clinics, two women health centres and a division of women's [health](#) policy.

The study was published in August 2012 in an edition of the *Australian Journal of Social Issues* (Volume 46 Number 4 2011).

Since 2005, Australia has been a signatory of the 2000 United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially [Women](#) and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime.

Provided by University of Queensland

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