

**Surviving Human Trafficking:  
Coping Strategies and Psychosocial Support of  
Female Survivors in Kosovo  
– A Qualitative Study -**

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by

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## Abstract

**Background:** Human trafficking is a human rights violation of global dimension. Many victims of trafficking are forced into prostitution. This study focuses on adolescent girls and women who were trafficked to or within Kosovo.

Victims of sexual exploitation show an increased risk of mental and physical health problems. The mental health consequences include PTSD, depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse. Physical health problems involve, among others, sexually transmitted diseases, acute injuries and poor nutrition. Different survival skills are employed in order to fight the traumatic experience and to arrive at the creation of a new life. Coping strategies and psychosocial support play an important role in adjusting one's life in stressful situations. The study examines the coping mechanisms, needs and conditions of survivors of trafficking turned prosecution witnesses in Kosovo. It further looks at key aspects of the work of a governmental shelter which takes care of these victims of trafficking.

**Methods:** A qualitative study with field research in Kosovo was undertaken, including semi-structured interviews with survivors of trafficking and shelter support staff. The assessment focused on the following areas: mental and physical health, coping strategies, need for psychosocial support, and institutional aspects.

**Findings:** Based on profiles of individual survivors and of interview staff, findings are based on the mental and physical health status of the survivors. Survivor coping strategies change over time from more negative coping strategies before admission to the shelter to more positive coping strategies in the course of staying at the shelter. Psychosocial support results in improved stabilization of the individual. Findings point to an adequacy of design and of the practical support provided to survivors.

**Conclusion:** These relate to general and mental health related findings, the aspect of women survivors of human trafficking as witnesses of the prosecution, the specific situation of survivors during and after their stay at the shelter, and the need for continuous supervision of ISF staff.