



TALITHA KOUMI

TO LOVE.TO LIBERATE.TO RESTORE

The more one dives into the murky world of prostitution in Indonesia, the more one goes from discovery to discovery. Always with the aim of obtaining a different light on the problem and on what is being done concretely to fight against the sex trafficking of human beings, Talitha Koumi was able to interview another actress working on the fringes of the world of prostitution, Ms. Suzie Ianti, Vice President of Child Welfare Department of Indramayu District, West Java, Indonesia.

Apart from a well-publicized example in Indonesia of the rescue of a young victim of prostitution, it seems that the situation of prostitution among underage girls is not as dire as the statistics suggest...



For the sake of transparency, Talitha Koumi had to pay IDR 500,000 in order for Ms. Ianti to agree to receive us for an interview.

Here is the full interview. The questions and answers have been edited for simplicity.

Q1.How many underage prostitutes do you think there are in Indramayu district alone?

We have never done a census to find out. We only receive reports of cases of human trafficking. There have been three in 2021 and one in 2022, so far.

Q2.Knowing that there are in Indonesia, and this only among minor prostitutes, more than 90,000 victims, how does she explain receiving so few cases?

In the case of ex-prostitutes, it is the social work department, and not ours, that does the follow-up.

(Note that this was not the question he was asked).

Q3.So your department is not directly involved in the fight against child sex trafficking?

The role of our department is to provide advice to victims. We are waiting to receive reports from the community or the police.

We accompany the victims in class and give them psychological support, but we are not proactive in the field.

Q4. According to your department, what are the reasons given by parents for selling their children to traffickers, whether for prostitution or forced labor?

We have not received any reports of parents selling their child(ren) to traffickers.

We rather observe that it is the children who are trapped on social networks. For example, there is the case of this young girl who was trapped in Jakarta and found herself in Papua in a "discotheque", then forced into prostitution.

Social services, in collaboration with the mother, the police and the army, managed to repatriate her.

(Talitha Koumi had the chance to meet the young girl in question. She is one of those who are currently supported by our organization.)

Q5. Okay, but she didn't answer my question. According to his department, what reasons do parents give for selling their children to traffickers, whether for prostitution or forced labor?

We know very well that there are many cases where it is the parents who ask the traffickers to sell their daughter to prostitution rings. Apart from the one high-profile case she tells me about, her response suggests that when a young girl finds herself in prostitution, it is her will to do so.

Q6. Do you think a young girl becomes a prostitute by choice?

In my opinion, girls who become prostitutes find themselves in this situation after being promised something else, interesting jobs, luxuries like nice clothes, a cell phone, etc.

Later, the trafficker or pimp then informs the girl that these gifts are not free and that she now has a debt to repay.

In general, it is therefore not by choice that a young girl prostitutes herself. She is trapped and finds herself a prisoner of her debt.

Q7. Do you think it's okay for a woman to prostitute herself?

No, surely not! A woman is valuable and just wants to be loved. Women caught in prostitution want to get out of it but are often forced to remain under threat by their pimp.

Q8. According to her department, why is a young girl trapped by traffickers?

There are 3 reasons. The first is the lack of love and consideration on the part of the child's parents.

There is also the child's lack of interest in school. If the stress related to studies is too great, a child will seek to escape from it. The desire to possess one's own things is also a factor that can lead a child to be trapped by a trafficker or pimp.

Finally, the social environment, i.e. friends will persuade the young girl to work instead of going to school.

Q9. Knowing that keeping girls in school is one of the surest ways to protect them, and considering that despite "free" schooling, school-related costs are high, does your department help families disadvantaged by supporting them financially?

We intervene with the victims by visiting them once a month to motivate them to persevere in their schooling. For those who do not want to go to school, we still try to support them, hoping that the motivation to go to school will return.

We also have a team (2 people) who visit the different regions to support dysfunctional families because their daughters are easy prey for traffickers.

For comparison, the Indramayu region occupies an area of 2040 km², has 317 villages, 31 districts with a population of 1,845,205 (2021). The island of Montreal has an area of 472.6 km² for a population of 2,025,968 inhabitants.

Q10. If the problem for schooling is financial, are there assistance programs for this type of situation?

Yes, there are resources, but they come from other government bodies than ours.

Q11. Do you have financial support programs for local foundations that try to help potential and proven victims of prostitution and who are fighting for their survival?

No, unfortunately, the budget allocated to us for our operation is very small and is only used for our own operations.

Q12. I interviewed traffickers and ex-traffickers who told me they were approached by parents interested in delivering their daughter to prostitution rings. What measures do you have in place to prevent this and what are the legal consequences for parents who commits this kind of act?

If ever we are informed of this kind of event, we will check what is happening and inform the police.

Q13. OK, but in practical terms, what happens to parents convicted of approaching traffickers with the intention of delivering their daughter to a prostitution ring?

It will be up to the court and the police to decide what happens next. We will, of course, encourage the judge to give the heaviest sentence possible.

Q14. My last question concerns section of law 506, which stipulates that if a procurer is found guilty, he faces a fine of US\$7 or 3 months in prison. Do you believe that these penalties are sufficient to deter this type of crime?

No, it is not enough to deter someone from committing this crime. The suffering endured by these girls far exceeds the pain incurred by the pimp because the road to recovery, for a victim, is very long.

As for the 3-month sentence, instead of having a deterrent effect, it can on the contrary enrage the pimp who, once released from prison, could try to return the girl or girls to force them to reimburse him for this which he regards as debts to him.

Also, a light sentence of 3 months may make the pimp just a bit more careful not to get caught again.

In my opinion, a 5 year sentence would be much more of a deterrent. The victim would feel safer and hopefully the pimp will have had enough time to regret the wrong he has done and turn his life around.

Article and interview: Daniel Jean
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