

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

2018 | Day 12



WHO AM I?

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LOSS OF IDENTITY

For victims of commercial sexual exploitation, loss of identity goes way beyond our psychological understanding and loss of self. Victims who have been trafficked and commercially sexually exploited lose their families and the bond of trust that often binds us as individuals to the larger society.

When a victim is exploited sexually, especially in a commercial context, she is often given different names, to hide and change her identity oftentimes when she is sold from one brothel keeper to another. Appallingly, this continues even after the victim is rescued from the trade and is residing in a shelter facility. It is common for the victims to lie about their identity, including their name and place of origin at the first instance after they are rescued. However, over a period of time, once they do disclose their identities, the insensitiveness of the system often terms them as liars and the victim, even after being rescued struggles with her identity.

The victims often in the search of emotional support, get lured by 'fancy men' who almost always act as their pimps and live off the earnings of these women. In order to prove their right over the women, these men change the women's names to suit their own religion. It is thus common for a Sunita to be called Shaba as per the whims of her 'fancy man'.

Besides being an emotional and psychological struggle for the victim, these changing names lead to multiple discrepancies in the documents proving the identity and residence of such victims. This struggle continues to be a part of the lives of the children born to these victims.

When families traffic their young daughters into the sex trade, it's often difficult for the victims to accept the reality, but once they do, it's difficult for them to reconcile with their families. The meaning of their familial relationship is often lost and that leaves them with a marred understanding of relationships which is often reflected in their future alliances.

Besides the destruction of their psychological self, the changing identities leave the victims with absolutely no sense of political or social belongingness. Post-rescue victims are often asked to prove that they belong to a particular region, either through residential proofs or through a letter from the local self-government bodies. Victims that are trafficked from across states and national borders as well, have in no way to prove that they originally belong to a particular district/village. Without an identity and residential proof, such victims are often left out of the social welfare systems and are not able to benefit from state/national schemes. Their children grow as stateless children and face great difficulties even if helped by civil society organizations to acquire an education.



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