

HopeNow Report on Methods 2021

This report describes in detail how HopeNow works and what methods they have developed to talk to victims of human trafficking in Denmark. The methods, which include interviewing to identify victims of trafficking, outreach work and therapeutic work are developed in a cultural and gender sensitive way in order to be able to help victims in a way that is according to their wishes and what is possible within the legal frameworks in Denmark. The report is based on interviews with Michelle, Director of HopeNow and Mercy, peer-group social worker, as well as participant observation in Fælledparken doing outreach work and several work days with HopeNow. It starts out with a vignette below that describes a case that is very typical for the way HopeNow works in prisons in Denmark.

Identifying a Victim of Human Trafficking

I get rung up by a man who says that he is in Ellebæk prison and he wants to speak to me because somebody else has recommended us. So I go in and I meet him. He is a young man in his late 20s and arrived in Denmark 4-5 years ago. I talk with him about what we do in HopeNow, that we work in the area of human trafficking and I show him my card which says empowering trafficked people. And then we have a chat, we talk a little bit about his family, he talks about the fact that his father died in 2015, his mother is unwell in Nigeria and there are three younger sisters who are all in very vulnerable ages. When he tells this, I immediately am aware of several key indicators of trafficking: this is a person whose father died and he was the breadwinner as a truck driver back in Nigeria. So I ask him if his family owns the house they live in. They don't own, they only rent. So when his father died, he left Nigeria to be able to provide for his family. At this point, I know that this person is trafficked. But I don't start with pushing on that. I tell him more about the work we do, I listen to more of his stories, we talk about family life, what it is like to be a man working here. I also tell him that we do not divulge, he can tell me anything he wants, I'm only there to take the parts of his story that would be relevant in order to protect him as much as possible. I also tell him that one of my jobs is to get people out of prison if it is possible within the structure of the Danish system. I say have a think about our conversation and I'll come back again. So when I come back a few days later he basically tells me a trafficking story. – Michelle

This interview excerpt with Michelle shows several of the methods HopeNow uses in their work to identify victims of human trafficking. These are among many creating trust, getting to know people through their extensive network with the African community in Denmark and a cultural and gender sensitive approach to interviewing victims of human trafficking. In the following a brief introduction to HopeNow's methods will be provided.

Deep hanging out – participating in informal social activities

One of the most important methods HopeNow uses to build relations with potential clients and extend their network is to be present at informal social activities among people from the African Diaspora in Copenhagen. HopeNow's peer-group social worker, Mercy, herself a survivor of trafficking in Denmark originally from Kenya, has a unique access to these kinds of events as she, being African, is culturally accepted and does not create mistrust and attract unwanted attention. During these social events HopeNow do screenings where they are looking for signs of people who have possibly been trafficked, those that are in a trafficking situation at present and formerly trafficked people. The presence at these social events are crucial for HopeNow to stay in touch with the community and spread the word about their work and organization. "It is not that we are going to interview people, we just go like, it is a social place to show ourselves, that we are still here and we still do our job and we still care for those people who need our help", Mercy explains. Most of the time, Mercy spends her time at these social activities just 'hanging out' with people she knows or people she wants to know. This method of just simply being present in informal settings for an extended period of time is what in Anthropology is referred to as 'deep-hanging out' (Geertz 1998). Through this method HopeNow gains knowledge about anything that goes on in the African community by just being present. Michelle elaborates on their outreach work: "we observe and interact, no questions asked. And everything goes on in the parks, everybody one would need to meet is there and Mercy can move freely and respectfully within this group". The network and relationships that HopeNow has built throughout deep-hanging out has proven to be quite helpful in their work as is also shown in the example above where a client contacts Michelle after being recommended to talk to HopeNow through a friend – a method often referred to as the snowball method. Michelle has many more examples of situations like this, where she or Mercy is contacted by a potential client who knows about them through these outreach activities. "In general, I'm surprised by how many people within the African Diaspora know us. We are talking thousands of people. And that is because we have been on the ground for a long time. And we appear as a general rule to have a good reputation", Michelle says. Besides extending HopeNow's network, the outreach work is also a part of creating trust and acceptance among the groups of people where there could be potential clients. Mercy elaborates: "when we go there [social activities] and we see them [people who need help] and we start talking to them and we laugh with them, it is like you are giving hope, ah she is around, maybe I have this problem, let me call her. Because we always go with our business cards". As such, the continuous presence at these social events helps HopeNow create a strong network and establishes the first level of trust and acceptance that is crucial for HopeNow to be able to help clients in the future. This level of trust between HopeNow and the African community also means that HopeNow can keep track of what is at stake in an area that is otherwise closed and secretive.

Mercy – A Cultural Mediator

I went to the prison where I was supposed to meet with a woman I know very well from my outreach work. The woman only speaks Nigerian pidgin English and is difficult to understand. Michelle had talked to the woman in prison several times, but she had always refused to tell her story, always telling Michelle that she didn't remember anything. When I entered the prison instead of Michelle, the woman immediately started laughing, happy to see a familiar face. I told her that she had to talk if she wanted to get help and not end up being deported back to Nigeria. The woman desperately wanted help but refused to tell me her story, so I told her that I would give her two days to think about it. After my visit I told Michelle that the woman remembered everything but was scared to open up to strangers and also to be misunderstood since her English was difficult to understand. After two days, I came back again and the woman agreed to tell me and Michelle her story. Michelle and I headed for the prison once again, I had prepared hot rice and chicken and she finally trusted us and told us her story and she was identified as trafficked. – Mercy

What this interview excerpt shows is how important Mercy's role as a cultural mediator is in order to create trust with clients. This role is crucial, not only because Mercy as an African can bridge a cultural gap but also because she, as a survivor of trafficking, can talk to and connect with clients through shared experience. Mercy elaborates from the example above: "I will understand most of the things she will tell. Because she couldn't explain it well, so she does not expect somebody from, you know, the police or CMM (Center Against Human Trafficking) to understand, because they are white, and they wouldn't understand". As such, Mercy plays a unique role in HopeNow's work because she is both an insider and an outsider with clients. An insider, because of her background and her experience as a victim of trafficking and an outsider because of her job as a peer-group social worker who is able to help the clients. This position as both insider and outsider is also very valuable in HopeNow's cooperation with the Government. Mercy explains how she uses her position to help CMM: "I think that I as a peer group worker and somebody who has been inside can help the Danish Government to enlighten them on what is at stake. We also cooperate with CMM, they can always call before an interview if they find that a client is difficult".

Creating Trust – "I always go there as a listener"

How victims of trafficking learn to trust others again and especially organizations is a big topic in advocacy and research on anti-trafficking (Brennan 2005: 42, Brennan & Plambech 2018: 6). Michelle explains that getting to know a victim of trafficking and getting them to talk to be able to identify them is a process that can easily push them into retraumatization. As such, it is crucial for social workers to know how you work respectfully with the knowledge that you have about the client and on a legal level to be able to offer the

person the best possible help. Michelle explains that when she goes to different prisons to identify potential victims of trafficking she always tries to connect with them on a human level before going into details about legal facts and their rights: “When I go to a prison the first thing I will say is that I am very sorry to find you in prison. And they haven't had anybody say that to them. So it is a question of starting with very small communication”. This approach of slowly and carefully creating a relationship with the client or, as Mercy puts it, getting to know them before you get close, is one of the most important methods that HopeNow uses. Michelle and Mercy describe trust building as a process that can take from days up to several years depending on the client’s situation and if they have been familiar with HopeNow before through their outreach work. One of the ways HopeNow works to create trust is to use the before mentioned method of deep-hanging out. This entails sharing stories about themselves with the clients, talking about all sorts of different topics that are not necessarily related to trafficking and most importantly not asking too many questions in the beginning, but being there as a listener: “If you are meeting a victim of human trafficking don't go there as somebody who asks a lot of questions. You have to go there as a listener”, Mercy says. She continues: “I can tell them about my story. I can tell them about my family. But I don't go too much into detail. Because you find that you can't just tell somebody three sentences about your family before they will open up to you. If I feel like she or he is not interested in talking to me, then I back off. And then I give it another try. I don't give up on them. I always try until I know exactly what kind of help they need”. This method of deep-hanging out and getting to know people personally is a difficult method to practice as it can easily move into something that is unprofessional, Michelle explains. “It will always be debatable where that line is. But it is that very line that I think is particularly unique about the way we work here in Denmark, because it is extremely foreign to the Danish Culture in social work”, she continues. In the end, creating trust is about acknowledging the victim as a human being, what in therapeutic language is called ‘mirroring’. Michelle says: “it is a question of really seeing someone, to actually be with a human being and see them and hear can be very empowering”.

A Cultural and Gender Sensitive Approach to Interviewing

One of the most difficult aspects of working with victims of human trafficking in a Danish context is the cultural differences between the Danish government agencies and NGOs and the clients. This can easily result in conflict and miscommunication, Michelle explains. According to Michelle, one of the major problems Danish government agencies have is that they are not very well trained to talk to and identify victims of trafficking because they simply lack the cultural knowledge such a task entails. She points that in order to identify more people who are trafficked in Denmark it is essential for the people who work with it to open their minds to the complexities of human trafficking. One of the ways to do this is, among others, to

treat everybody as an individual and not lump them together as one big group of ‘victims of trafficking’. Michelle explains that there are differences between each case depending on how they have been trafficked: “Have they been trafficked by an individual who has taken advantage of their situation or have they been trafficked by a member of a cult and owe them money. All of that has to be taken into consideration so each case can be analyzed individually”. This point is echoed in many researchers’ approaches to working with victims of human trafficking (Brennan 2005).

Having a cultural and gender sensitive approach to interviewing is especially important as most clients won’t say that they are victims of trafficking. Either because they don’t associate their own story with trafficking or because they don’t want to see themselves as victims. “People do not want to be victims. and they don't want to loose control of their lives. Now, if they have in fact lost control, because they have been trafficked and manipulated and they owe money and their family is under pressure - to start to come into that area with just straight questions or to quickly actually undermines their psychological state and it will mean that the communication dissolves. So that is where it is like taking a temperature that is changing all the time. And the way that I have been trained is to observe what is going on with the body-language, ” Michelle comments. An example of this could be “ if a person starts to go into what I can see is the trauma bubble or the trauma vortex then we change the subject or then I say what is it that gives you strength - then they will talk about their religion or their belief in God. And then I bring out the Bible”, Michelle says. In this quote, Michelle both draws on her educational background as a trauma therapist but also on the cultural knowledge she has gained over 30 years of experience working with African victims of human trafficking. Cultural knowledge is something that HopeNow is very attentive to and both Mercy and Michelle use their knowledge about religion, politics, gender norms and structural issues in various African countries in their work to identify victims of trafficking in Denmark.

One of the ways HopeNow works with their cultural knowledge is through their sensitive approach to interviewing victims. A good example of this is their understanding and respect of the phenomenon of juju (a popular term for a spiritual belief system practiced in West Africa) and how it affects Nigerian victims of trafficking. In the context of migration to Europe, migrants swear an oath prior to departure and are under bond not to reveal anything about their journey, their debt or their situation in Europe to authorities (Plambech 2014: 167). As such, it can be difficult to talk about juju with victims of trafficking. Michelle explains that nearly all Nigerian victims of trafficking have taken juju oaths and that being culturally aware of the effects of juju is of utmost importance if one wants to understand trafficking from Nigeria to Europe and

be able to help the victims in the best possible way. She explains one of the ways she will approach the subject with a client: “At a certain point with a Nigerian man I will talk about the fact that I have been in Nigeria and I will usually use a parallel story. I will talk about another man that I met in prison and I will then bring up juju. When I bring up juju I will look at the body language. And then I will know. And then he will know that I know”. Getting a client to talk about juju is important because it almost always reveals trafficking stories. As such, knowing the workings of juju and being able to talk about it in a culturally respectful way with the client is an essential method to understand why and how the client ended up in Denmark in a trafficking situation. Talking about juju is of course not the only way to identify a victim of trafficking as they come from many different countries and backgrounds and can have completely different stories. However, Michelle explains that there are certain things most victims of trafficking have in common like, having no money, a debt and someone to provide for in their home country, that HopeNow is always attentive to.

Creating a relationship with a client and building trust in order for them to share information about their situation can be difficult because of gender differences. As such, HopeNow have developed methods and techniques to talk with male victims of trafficking. Michelle says: “With the African men I started to ask them questions that would be appropriate to their gender. We will often start talking about politics and about relationships and how they feel about being a man here and then we will go deeper and deeper into the story that lays behind the story that they presented to the authorities”. Not being sensitive to cultural differences and gender will result in a lack of understanding of the workings of trafficking from Africa to Europe, which at the end will lead to fewer victims being identified and helped.

This report is written for HopeNow in September 2021 by anthropologist Rebecca Solovej, Intern at HopeNow August 2021