Study: Trafficked Women in Southeast Asia at Greater Risk for HIV

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A many as a quarter of a million women and girls in Southeast Asia—mainly between the ages of 12 and 16—are forced into the sex trade, putting them at risk for violence and a higher likelihood of contracting HIV, reports Reuters. These victims are often raped, locked up, forced to take drugs and alcohol and denied food, water and medical care.

“Victims of trafficking suffer horrendous, horrendous violations of human rights, deprivations of the most basic human dignity. It’s a form of enslavement,” said Jay Silverman, an associate professor at the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston.

Caitlin Wiesen, an HIV expert for the UN Development Program, said many of these sex-trafficked women are promised employment as domestic workers or in restaurants but end up in brothels where they suffer “extreme situations of violence and exploitation.”

According to a U.N. study titled “Sex Trafficking and STI/HIV in Southeast Asia: Connections Bbetween Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Sexual Risk,” trafficked women and girls are vulnerable to more frequent sexual encounters than sex industry workers. Seventy-three percent of Cambodian women and girls who were rescued tested positive for sexually transmitted infections.

Researchers recommend that the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations and law enforcement agencies convene to discuss the best way to handle the matter.

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