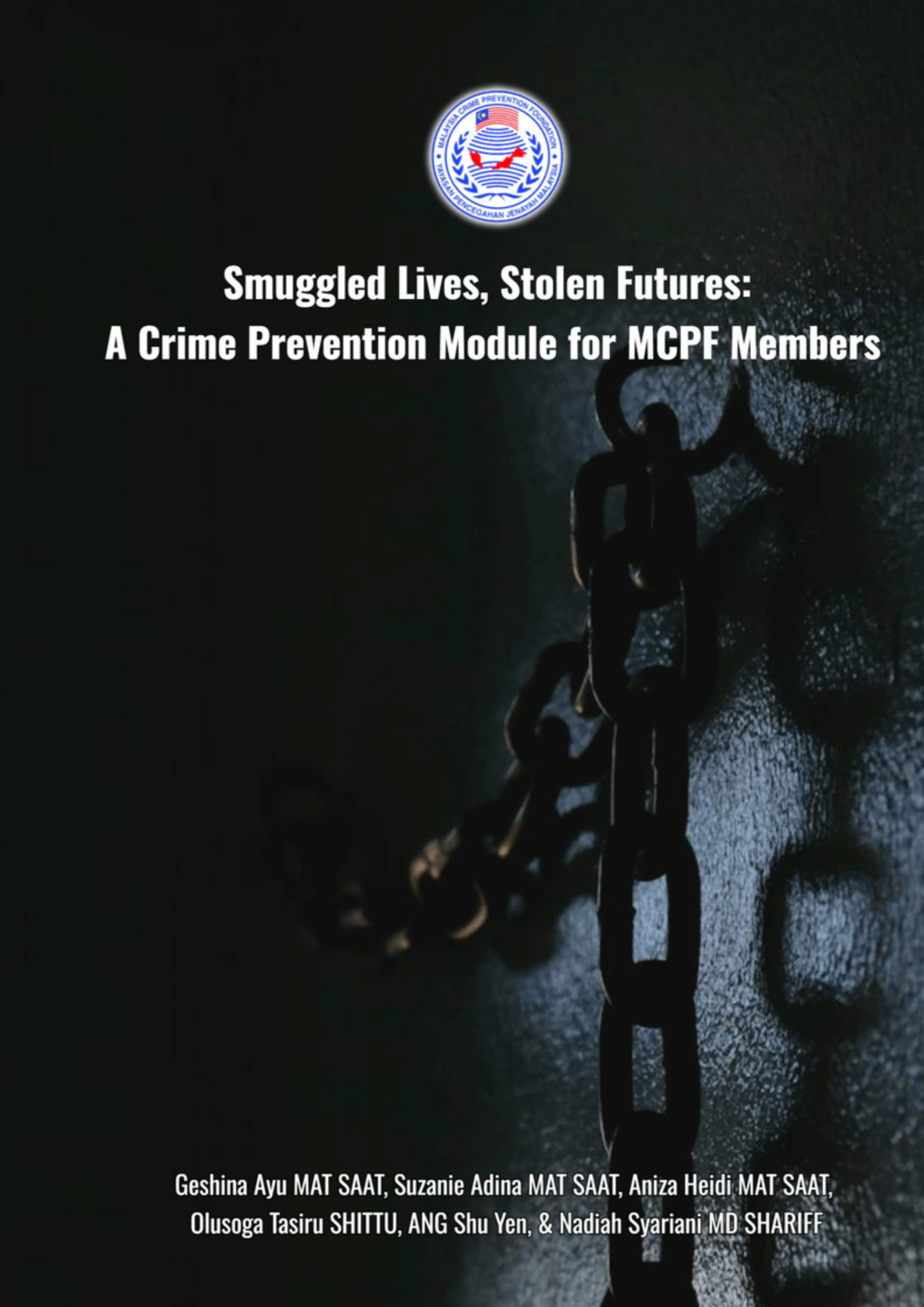


Smuggled Lives, Stolen Futures: A Crime Prevention Module for MCPF Members

Geshina Ayu MAT SAAT, Suzanie Adina MAT SAAT, Aniza Heidi MAT SAAT,
Olusoga Tasiru SHITTU, ANG Shu Yen, & Nadiah Syariani MD SHARIFF

Smuggled Lives, Stolen Futures:
A Crime Prevention Module for MCPF Members

**Geshina Ayu MAT SAAT, Suzanie Adina MAT SAAT, Aniza Heidi MAT SAAT,
Olusoga Tasiru SHITTU, ANG Shu Yen, & Nadiah Syariani MD SHARIFF**

Smuggled Lives, Stolen Futures: A Crime Prevention Module for MCPF Members

Authors:
Geshina Ayu MAT SAAT
Suzanie Adina MAT SAAT
Aniza Heidi MAT SAAT
Olusoga Tasiru SHITTU
ANG Shu Yen
Nadiah Syariani MD SHARIFF

Published by:
Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF)
B-3A-13, Blok B, Aras 4, Unit 13,
Megan Avenue II,
Jalan Yap Kwan Seng,
50450 Kuala Lumpur

Tel: +603-21810055
E-mail: support@mcpf.org.my
Website https://mcpf.org.my

Figures & tables: Geshina Ayu MAT SAAT
Images: MCPF, subscribed on Unsplash, and creative commons
Readability: Some sections utilised Copilot to improve understanding from Academic language to layman language.

First Print: 2026

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Printed in Malaysia by:
Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF)

eISBN: 978-967-xxxx-xx-x

Contents

Preface

Across Southeast Asia, movement has always been part of our shared history. People migrate in search of work, dignity, and a future that feels possible. Yet along these journeys, too many lives are diverted by deception, coercion, and exploitation. Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are not distant crimes confined to borders or hidden networks. They occur in familiar spaces—villages, worksites, transit points, and cities—often misunderstood, frequently unseen, and too rarely challenged.

Smuggled Lives, Stolen Futures was developed with one clear purpose: to strengthen prevention through understanding. This ebook approaches trafficking and migrant smuggling not as abstract legal terms, but as lived experiences shaped by vulnerability, misinformation, weak safeguards, and unequal access to justice. At its heart is a simple truth: prevention is not the responsibility of a single institution. It belongs to all of us—communities, civil society, educators, employers, local leaders, and informed citizens.

Designed as a practical crime prevention module, this book equips readers with the knowledge and perspectives needed to recognise risk, respond responsibly, and protect human dignity. It brings together legal foundations, common patterns of exploitation, victim-centred approaches, and community-based prevention strategies, while remaining grounded in regional realities relevant to South East Asia and beyond. Throughout, the message is clear: vulnerability is never consent, and victims should never be blamed for the harm inflicted upon them.

As advocates working against trafficking and smuggling, we see daily how silence enables abuse, misinformation fuels exploitation, and stigma isolates survivors. This ebook challenges those conditions. It encourages critical thinking, ethical action, and shared responsibility. It asks readers not only to identify crime, but to reflect on the systems and attitudes that allow exploitation to persist—and on how informed action can interrupt harm.

This work is a call to conscience rooted in compassion. Every exploited life represents a failure of protection. Every informed response, however small, restores hope. May this ebook guide, empower, and inspire collective action to protect lives and futures across our region.

GESHINA A. MAT SAAT
EXCO & Chairperson
TIPSOM Committee
Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation

Acknowledgements

This ebook was made possible through the generous sponsorship and unwavering commitment of the Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF). MCPF's long-standing dedication to crime prevention, public awareness, and community resilience has provided vital support for initiatives that confront human trafficking and migrant smuggling with clarity, compassion, and purpose. We are deeply grateful for their trust and belief in education as a powerful tool for prevention.

Special thanks to the Universiti Sains Malaysia, Prince Sultan University, Nigeria Police Academy, Manipal University, and Australasia College of Health & Wellness staff for their support and for fostering a productive environment that allowed me to bring this project to fruition.

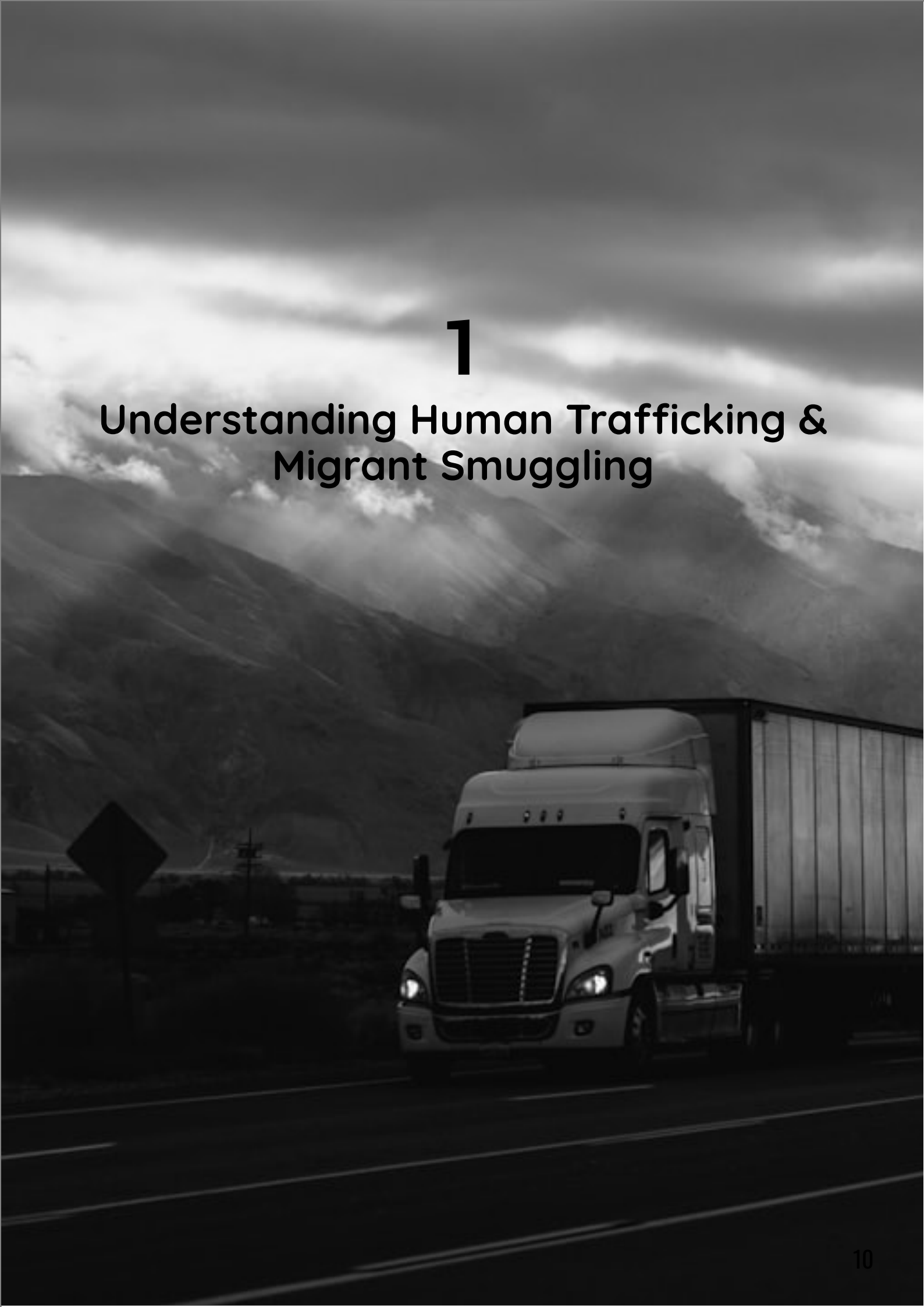
We extend our sincere appreciation to the Ministry of Home Affairs of Malaysia and its various departments for their continued leadership and collaborative efforts in addressing trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants (TIPSOM). Our thanks go especially to the Royal Malaysia Police, the Department of Immigration, the National Security Office (MAPO), IPSOM, the Prevention of Crime Board, and other dedicated agencies whose policy direction, enforcement work, and inter-agency coordination remain essential to national protection and justice efforts.

This ebook also honours the tireless work of MCPF volunteers and the many NGO volunteers across Malaysia and the region. Often working quietly and with limited resources, these individuals stand on the frontlines of prevention, outreach, and victim support. Their commitment—to educate communities, assist survivors, and challenge exploitation—reflects the strength of civil society in confronting crimes that thrive on silence and fear.

Above all, we acknowledge the victims and survivors of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Their lived experiences—marked by fear, loss, and profound suffering—are the reason this work exists. We recognise the courage it takes to survive exploitation and, in many cases, to speak out. This ebook is dedicated to them: as a tribute to their resilience, a recognition of their pain, and a commitment to ensuring that no story of exploitation is ignored or forgotten.

May this collective effort strengthen prevention, restore dignity, and reaffirm our shared responsibility to protect human life and human rights.

Disclosure: *Some paragraphs in this ebook were refined with the assistance of Copilot, used as a language-support tool to improve readability, clarity, and flow while preserving the original intent, substance, and advocacy voice of the authors. This approach reflects a spirit of collective authorship, where human expertise, lived experience, and ethical judgment remain central, and digital tools are used responsibly to support effective communication and public education.*



1

Understanding Human Trafficking & Migrant Smuggling

1

Understanding Human Trafficking & Migrant Smuggling

1.1 Introduction

In the shadows of global migration and economic desperation, a brutal trade thrives—one that commodifies human lives and shatters the very essence of dignity. Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are not just crimes; they are orchestrated violations of humanity that leave behind a trail of broken bodies, stolen childhoods, and silenced voices. Victims are lured with false promises, coerced through fear, and trapped in cycles of exploitation that span borders and generations.

Imagine a young girl forced into sexual servitude, her identity erased and her cries unheard. Picture a father suffocating in a sealed container, chasing the illusion of a better life. These are not isolated tragedies—they are the lived realities of millions. The trauma inflicted is not only physical but psychological, embedding deep scars that persist long after the chains are removed. Survivors often grapple with post-traumatic stress, shame, and a fractured sense of self, while society struggles to see them beyond their victimhood.

This introduction is not meant to shock for spectacle, but to awaken conscience. Behind every statistic is a human being—someone's child, sibling, or parent—whose life was hijacked by greed and indifference. To confront this crisis, we must first confront its horror.

Trafficking in humans and smuggling of migrants (TIPSOM) are not distant crimes confined to border zones or foreign lands. They are unfolding in our own communities, often hidden in plain sight. As MCPF members, we are uniquely positioned to challenge these atrocities not just through enforcement, but through advocacy that reaches hearts and minds. Our voices carry weight in schools, mosques, kampungs, and urban centers, where awareness can mean the difference between silence and rescue. By speaking out, educating others, and confronting myths, especially those that blame victims or normalize exploitation; we become the first line of defense against these crimes.

Advocacy alone is not enough. MCPF members must also serve as enablers of support—bridges between victims and the help they desperately need. Survivors often face immense barriers: fear of retaliation, shame, language gaps, and mistrust of authorities. We must cultivate safe spaces where victims feel seen, heard, and believed. Whether it's guiding them to legal aid, trauma counseling, or shelter services, our role is to ensure that no survivor walks alone. Every act of support—no matter how small—can restore dignity and hope to someone whose life was nearly erased.

This mission demands courage, empathy, and relentless commitment. It means challenging institutional inertia, pushing for better victim protection policies, and ensuring that frontline responders are trained to recognize and respond to trafficking indicators. It means listening to survivors and letting their stories shape our strategies. As MCPF members, we are not just crime preventers—we are protectors of humanity. Let us rise to this calling, together.

The objectives of this training module are to:

1. Provide basic exposure to MCPF members about human trafficking and migrant smuggling.
2. Introduce methods to identify and help victims through first-aid, criminological, victimological, and psychological approaches.
3. Enhance social awareness in the context of crime prevention and victim protection.

At the end of the training, MCPF members should have:

1. Increased understanding of human trafficking and migrant smuggling.
2. Basic skills in identifying victims and acting ethically.
3. Collaborative network between MCPF members and relevant agencies.



EXERCISE: TIPSOM Knowledge

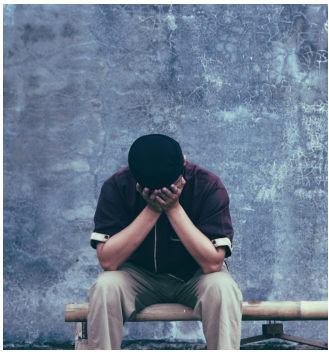
Instructions: Review each statement. Depending on your knowledge, tick ✓ either in the NO or Yes cell for each statement.

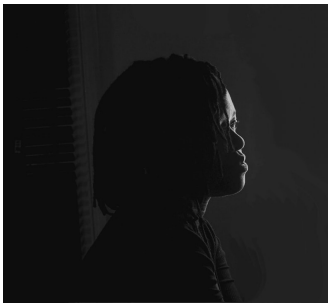
	Knowledge	No	Yes
1	Human trafficking is the same as migrant smuggling.		
2	Smuggling ends once migrants reach their destination.		
3	All trafficking involves physical violence or kidnapping.		
4	Smuggled migrants are criminals.		
5	Only women and girls are trafficked.		
6	Smuggled migrants are always victims of trafficking.		
7	Victims must be undocumented immigrants.		
8	Trafficking only happens in illegal or underground industries.		
9	Smuggling is always organised by criminal syndicates.		
10	All commercial sex is human trafficking.		
11	Smuggling only happens across international borders.		
12	Victims always try to escape or seek help.		
13	Trafficking requires movement across borders.		
14	Consent at any point negates trafficking.		
15	Trafficking is always linked to organised crime.		

Once you have finished this exercise, refer to Appendix B for explanations.

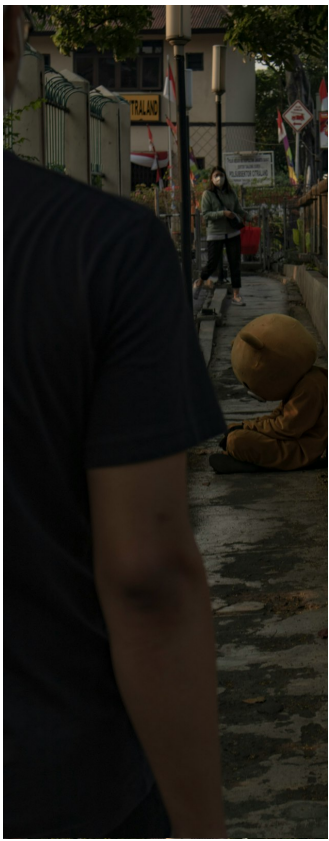
1.2 Definitions and Elements

At the core of any effective response lies a clear and unambiguous understanding of human trafficking and smuggling — different yet related crimes that continue to occur across the world.





You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know
William Wilberforce



Human Trafficking
Human trafficking is a crime defined not by movement but by control, not by choice but by coercion. It is the systematic exploitation of vulnerability through force, fraud, or abuse of power, stripping individuals of autonomy under the false promise of opportunity. This is not migration. It is not labour dispute. It is a deliberate and sustained violation of human dignity, recognised globally as a grave breach of fundamental rights.

According to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (UNODC 2025), human trafficking is:
"The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."

International law identifies three essential elements that together constitute this crime: the action taken, the means used, and the purpose intended. Whether it involves forced labour, sexual exploitation, or the removal of organs, each case hinges on these components. Consent, when obtained under conditions of desperation, deception, or power imbalance, holds no legal or moral weight. The victim's agreement does not transform exploitation into consent. These patterns thrive where oversight is weak, reporting is feared, and institutions remain silent.

Migrant Smuggling

Migrant smuggling is a separate offence in which individuals voluntarily seek passage across borders, where they are not a national or resident, typically for financial or other material gain, and they are aware of the risks involved.

According to the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (UNODC, 2025), migrant smuggling is:
"The procurement, for financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident."

Migrant smuggling is not just a logistical operation—it's a high-risk, profit-driven crime that exploits desperation and dreams. Under international law, this offence is defined by three essential elements: the act, the means, and the purpose. Together, they form a pattern of illicit movement that often ends in tragedy.

The act involves the procurement or facilitation of illegal entry into a country. This could be a syndicate arranging forged travel documents for Rohingya refugees, or a boat operator ferrying undocumented workers across the Straits of Malacca under cover of night.

The means typically include transportation across borders—by land, sea, or air—and are carried out for financial or material gain. Smugglers may charge thousands of ringgit for a perilous journey in overcrowded lorries or hidden compartments, with no regard for the migrants' safety or survival.

The purpose is to bypass immigration laws—not necessarily to exploit the migrant, but to profit from their vulnerability. Migrants are often perceived as cargo and are treated as such, disregarding basic human rights.

1.3 Key Differences

The line between smuggling and trafficking is not obvious. A Bangladeshi man smuggled into Malaysia for construction work may later be coerced into forced labor when his debt to the smuggler is used as leverage. While the initial act may not involve exploitation, the consequences can be devastating. Confusing the two leads to misdirected interventions, inadequate protection, and legal confusion that leaves victims without recourse.

This distinction is not theoretical. It determines who receives help and who is left behind. Understanding these elements helps MCPF members and frontline responders identify smuggling operations early, intervene effectively, and prevent migrants from falling into deeper cycles of abuse.

ASPECT	HUMAN TRAFFICKING	MIGRANT SMUGGLINGS
Victimisation	Crime against a person	Crime against the state
Consent	Victims do not consent or are deceived / coerced	Migrants consent to be smuggled, though often under false promises
Legal framework in Malaysia	Covered under the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007 (ATIPSOM)	Also addressed under ATIPSOM, but with different enforcement and protection mechanisms
Purpose	Exploitation (e.g.: forced labour, sexual abuse, slavery)	Illegal migration (not necessarily exploitation)
Means used	Force, fraud, coercion, deception, abuse of vulnerability	Payment or agreement for transportation across borders
Victim status	Individuals are victims of crime and entitled to protection	Individuals are violators of immigration law, but may face abuse or exploitation
Human rights impact	Severe and prolonged trauma; physical, psychological, and social harm	Risk of abuse, abandonment, or death during transit; limited legal protection
Ethical concern	Involves gross violation of human dignity and autonomy	Raises concerns about migrant vulnerability, exploitation by smugglers, and border safety
Victim-centered response	Requires rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration	Requires screening for trafficking risks, humanitarian aid, and legal guidance
Overlap potential	Smuggled migrants may become trafficked during or after the journey	Smuggling networks may evolve into trafficking operations

The divide between human trafficking and migrant smuggling is not one of scale but of intent and consequence. One is defined by coercion and ongoing control; the other by initial consent and transactional, however desperate the circumstances that led to it. Trafficking traps individuals in cycles of abuse that persist long after movement has ended. Smuggling, while often dangerous and sometimes abusive, typically concludes once a border is crossed and payment is settled. In other words, smuggling begins with consent, trafficking ends with captivity.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A stark example unfolded in 2015, when Malaysian authorities discovered mass graves and human trafficking camps in the jungles of Bukit Wang Burma, Wang Kelian, Perlis, near the Thai border. These sites were used by smuggling syndicates transporting Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants. While the initial intent was smuggling, many victims were held in brutal conditions, extorted for ransom, and subjected to physical abuse—blurring the line between smuggling and trafficking. Survivors described being beaten, starved, and abandoned in the jungle. The case shocked the nation and exposed the deadly consequences of unchecked smuggling networks operating in tandem with trafficking rings.

In practice, these lines often blur. People who agree to pay for passage may find themselves forced into labor, sexual exploitation, or debt bondage after arrival. These are not rare exceptions but predictable outcomes in regions where legal protections are weak and oversight is absent. It unfolds daily in communities across Malaysia, often unnoticed until crisis forces attention

Smuggling networks often overlap with trafficking rings. Research from regional migration routes shows that more than one in three individuals initially classified as smuggled migrants later display signs of prolonged coercion. This fluidity demands that responders treat every case with caution, assuming deeper harm may be present even when surface indicators suggest otherwise.

This terminology difference shapes every aspect of response—from how cases are detected to how survivors are supported after rescue. It also underscores the importance of community involvement and the role of education in dismantling the networks that perpetuate crime.

Language matters in cases of TIPSOM. Vague or careless terms obscure reality. Language shapes legal interpretations, public understanding, and victim protection strategies. Misusing or conflating terms like "trafficking" and "smuggling" can lead to serious consequences, including misidentifying victims, misapplying laws, and failing to provide appropriate support. Calling trafficking illegal migration or labour abuse dilutes its gravity. It is not simply an absence of documentation or a workplace dispute. It is the calculated dismantling of freedom, often hidden in plain sight — within private homes, remote farms, informal workshops, or digital platforms masking predatory recruitment as legitimate employment.

From a public education and advocacy standpoint, language influences stigma and empathy. Using terms like "illegal immigrant" instead of "smuggled migrant" or "trafficking victim" can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and discourage survivors from seeking help. In Malaysia, where TIPSOM cases intersect with labor migration, refugee movements, and gender-based violence, culturally sensitive and legally accurate language is essential for outreach, policy reform, and survivor empowerment. Advocates, journalists, and educators must be deliberate in their word choices to ensure clarity, compassion, and accountability in addressing these complex crimes (Engage Together, 2025).

1.4 Technology and TIPSOM

Methods used by syndicates and perpetrators evolve with technology, adapting to surveillance, border controls, and public awareness. Social media and the internet have become integral tools in the operations of TIPSOM networks and operations, especially in Southeast Asia. Online job portals now serve as traps. Social media becomes a tool of manipulation. Traffickers and smugglers exploit platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and encrypted messaging apps to recruit, advertise, and coordinate illicit activities. They often pose as legitimate employers, romantic partners, or migration facilitators (RMP, 2025), using persuasive language and imagery to lure individuals, especially those facing economic hardship or social vulnerability (Moore, 2024); into exploitative situations. These digital platforms allow perpetrators to reach a global audience while masking their identities, making detection and prevention more difficult (Rossoni, Büyükkalkan, & Erken, 2024).

The internet also facilitates the logistical aspects of trafficking and smuggling (Sanchez, 2017; Zulkifli, et. al., 2024; Aziani, Jofre, & Mancuso, 2025). Encrypted communication tools such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal enable traffickers to organize routes, payments, and victim transfers with minimal risk of interception. Online financial systems, including cryptocurrency and peer-to-peer payment apps; allow for anonymous transactions that bypass traditional banking scrutiny. Smugglers use GPS and mapping apps to guide migrants across borders, often into dangerous terrain, while maintaining remote control over their movements (Pahlevi, 2024; Zulkifli, et. al., 2024). These technologies have transformed trafficking from localized crime into a transnational enterprise.

Social media algorithms can inadvertently amplify trafficking risks (Aziani, Jofre, & Mancuso, 2025). Platforms that prioritize engagement may surface misleading job ads, romantic scams, or migration "success stories" that are fronts for exploitation (Rossoni, Büyükkalkan, & Erken, 2024). In some cases, traffickers use livestreams or viral content to normalize or glamorize exploitative practices, making them appear aspirational. Migrants and job seekers may be drawn in by comments and testimonials from fake accounts, reinforcing the illusion of safety and opportunity (Zulkifli, et. al., 2024). This manipulation of digital trust undermines public awareness campaigns and complicates law enforcement efforts.

Despite these dangers, digital platforms also offer avenues for resistance and intervention. Law enforcement agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs) increasingly use open-source intelligence (OSINT) to monitor trafficking patterns, identify recruiters, and disrupt online networks. Survivor-led advocacy is growing, with individuals sharing their experiences on social media to warn others and promote support services. In Malaysia, initiatives like #SayaSelamat and digital literacy campaigns aim to educate youth and migrant communities about online risks, empowering them to recognize and report suspicious activity. These efforts highlight the dual role of technology as both a threat and a tool for justice.

Legally, the use of social media and the internet in human trafficking and migrant smuggling presents complex challenges for enforcement and prosecution. In Malaysia, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007 (ATIPSOM) does not yet fully address digital recruitment or online facilitation, leaving

gaps in how cyber-enabled crimes are investigated and charged. Traffickers who use online platforms to groom or deceive victims may evade prosecution if digital evidence is not admissible or if jurisdictional boundaries complicate enforcement. Moreover, platforms hosting such content may not be held accountable under current laws unless they are proven to have knowingly facilitated criminal activity. This underscores the urgent need for legal reform that incorporates cybercrime provisions, mandates platform cooperation, and strengthens digital forensic capacity to ensure traffickers and smugglers are held accountable for online exploitation.

To effectively combat online-enabled trafficking and smuggling, governments and tech companies must collaborate on regulation, enforcement, and education. This includes updating legal frameworks to address digital recruitment, enhancing platform accountability, and investing in trauma-informed outreach. Cross-border cooperation is essential, as traffickers often operate across jurisdictions. In Malaysia, integrating cybercrime units with immigration enforcement and victim support services can strengthen national resilience. Ultimately, a multidisciplinary approach combining criminology, digital forensics, and community engagement is vital to protect vulnerable populations from exploitation in the digital age.

Legal and Enforcement Gaps in Cyber-Enabled TIPSOM

Outdated Legal Provisions	•ATIPSOM does not explicitly address digital recruitment, online grooming, or the use of social media and encrypted apps in trafficking and smuggling operations. This mismatch between law and evolving cybercrime tactics limits prosecutorial reach.
Lack of Specific Cybercrime Frameworks	•Malaysia currently lacks a comprehensive law tailored to cross-border cybercrime, making it difficult to pursue perpetrators who operate online or from abroad.
Limited Admissibility of Digital Evidence	•Challenges persist in collecting, authenticating, and presenting digital evidence (e.g., chat logs, social media posts, cryptocurrency transactions) in court under ATIPSOM's current structure.
Weak Platform Accountability	•Social media and tech platforms are not clearly obligated under ATIPSOM to cooperate with investigations or remove trafficking-related content unless proven to have knowingly facilitated criminal activity.
Insufficient Technical Expertise and Resources	•Enforcement agencies often lack trained personnel in digital forensics and cyber investigations. This hinders their ability to trace online recruitment patterns, decrypt communications, and track financial flows.
Jurisdictional Challenges	•Cyber-enabled trafficking often involves actors across multiple countries. ATIPSOM's provisions for extraterritorial enforcement are limited and rarely invoked, complicating cross-border prosecutions.
Delayed Legislative Updates	•Although amendments were made in 2022, they focused on definitions and penalties rather than integrating cybercrime-specific clauses or enforcement mechanisms.

1.5 Relevance to Malaysia's Context

Malaysia stands at the heart of regional migration flows, shaped by its economic growth, strategic location, and heavy reliance on foreign labour. These conditions create fertile ground for exploitation, where vulnerable individuals are lured by promises of legitimate work only to fall into systems of coercion and control (Hoffstaedter, & Missbach, 2021; Lelliott & Miller, 2023; Liu, 2024). The movement of people across borders, whether voluntary or forced, reveals deep imbalances between source and destination economies, rooted in unequal access to opportunity, fair wages, and legal protection (UNODC, 2025).

Large informal sectors in construction, agriculture, domestic service, and fisheries operate with minimal oversight, leaving workers exposed to abuse (Transparentem, 2024). Many lack proper documentation, making them easy targets for exploitation (Transparentem, 2024). Weak monitoring systems allow these abuses to continue undetected for months or even years. Compounding this, porous land and maritime borders in eastern and southern regions strain enforcement capacity, enabling traffickers to move people with little risk of interception (UNODC, 2025).

Internal barriers further deepen vulnerability. Language differences, cultural isolation, and limited understanding of legal rights leave many unaware of how to seek help. Fear of deportation or retaliation silences victims, not out of choice but because institutions and social structures fail to offer safety or recourse. This silence is not natural. it is enforced by systems that discourage reporting and delay justice.

Addressing this requires more than reactive policing. It demands a focused effort on root causes: economic exclusion, fragmented regulations, and widespread distrust in authority. Effective detection and support depend on embedding awareness into daily life, from transport hubs and recruitment offices to workplaces and local neighborhoods. Without this integration, interventions remain isolated, easily bypassed, and ultimately ineffective.

Why Anti-TIPSOM Training Matters for Malaysia and MCPF Members

1. **Malaysia's Role as a Source, Transit, and Destination Country**
   - Malaysia is identified by international bodies as a hub for both trafficking and smuggling due to its strategic location, porous borders, and demand for cheap labor. MCPF members must understand these dynamics to support prevention, detection, and victim protection efforts.

2. **Alignment with National and International Legal Obligations**
   - Malaysia is a signatory to the UN Palermo Protocols and has enacted the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007 (ATIPSOM). Training ensures MCPF members can interpret and apply these laws correctly, especially when advising policymakers or engaging with enforcement agencies.

3. **Community-Level Detection and Early Intervention**
   - MCPF members often work closely with schools, NGOs, and local councils. Training equips them to recognize red flags, such as suspicious recruitment, grooming, or movement patterns; and intervene before exploitation occurs.

4. **Digital Literacy and Cybercrime Awareness**
   - With traffickers increasingly using social media and encrypted apps, MCPF members need to understand how online platforms are exploited and how to educate communities about digital risks, especially youth and migrant populations.

5. **Victim-Centered and Trauma-Informed Approaches**
   - Effective anti-TIPSOM work requires sensitivity to survivors' needs. Training helps MCPF members adopt non-judgmental, trauma-informed practices when interacting with victims, ensuring dignity, safety, and access to support services.

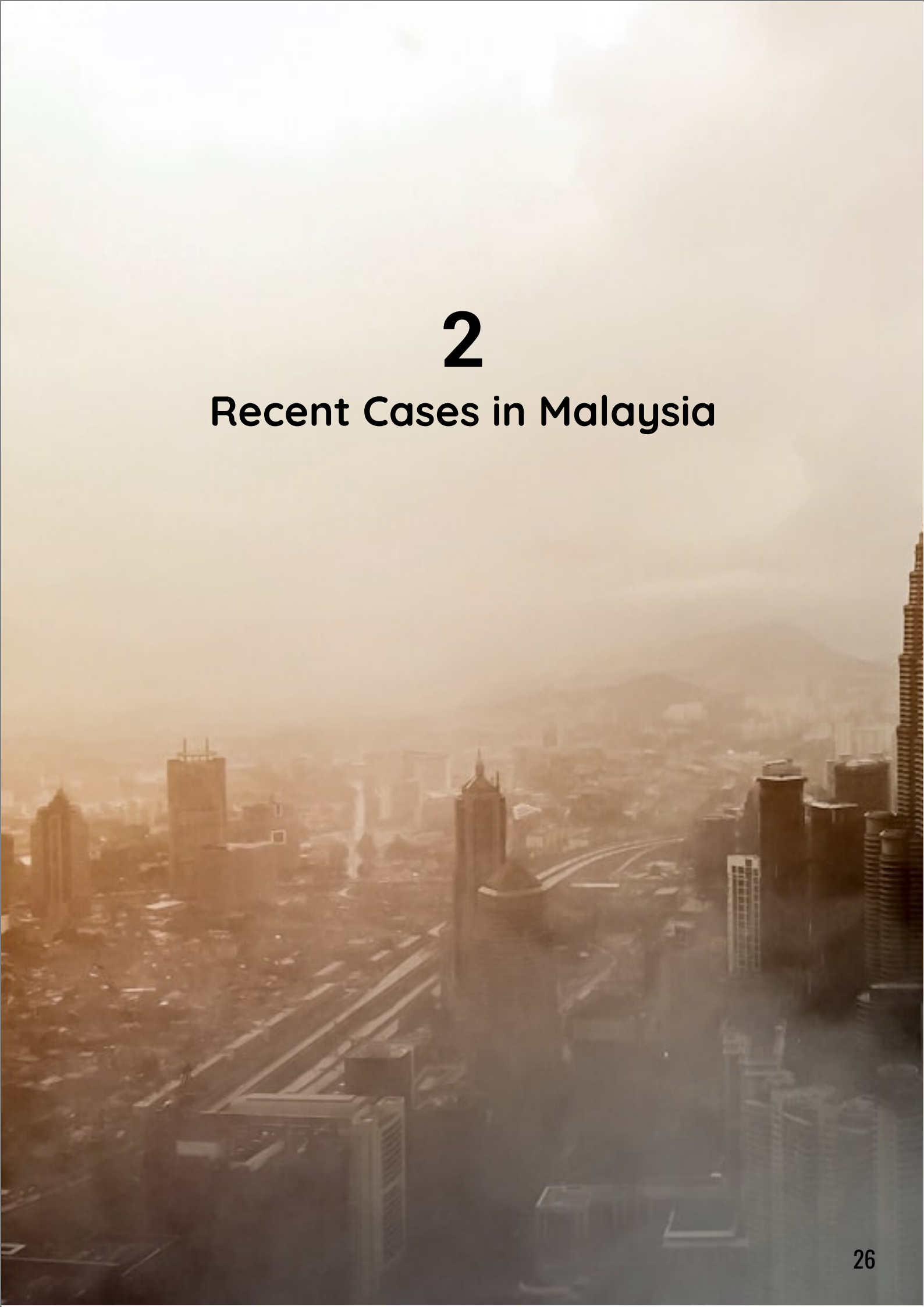
6. **Strategic Collaboration and Policy Advocacy**
   - MCPF members are well-positioned to influence public discourse and policy. Training enhances their ability to advocate for reforms, such as better victim support, cybercrime prevention, and cross-agency coordination; based on evidence and international best practices.

Success hinges on coordinated action across government ministries, civil society, and private enterprises. Policies must reflect ground realities, not theoretical ideals. While Malaysia's legal framework has improved, implementation remains inconsistent due to limited resources and competing priorities. The gap between law and practice is not bureaucratic—it is human. It shows in delayed rescues, overcrowded shelters, and prolonged trauma for those who survive exploitation.

The future of this fight lies in adaptive strategies that evolve with emerging threats. Digital recruitment through encrypted platforms is rising, demanding new forms of intelligence gathering and cross-border cooperation. At the same time, community vigilance has proven powerful when backed by clear reporting channels and strong protection guarantees. Lasting progress will not come from isolated raids or isolated policies but from sustained trust-based partnerships across sectors.

This context forms the essential foundation for everything that follows. Understanding how trafficking functions on the ground allows MCPF members to better interpret case studies with greater accuracy, navigate legal complexities with cultural awareness, and apply identification tools with sensitivity. The path forward is not marked by occasional successes but by consistent, systemic attention, where every report, every interaction, every policy tweak contributes to a broader transformation in how society sees, responds to, and ultimately prevents hidden suffering.

NOTES:



2

Recent Cases in Malaysia

2
Recent Cases in Malaysia

2.1 Overview of Notable Incidents

In recent years, hidden systems of exploitation have taken root in Malaysia, preying on individuals lured by false promises of work and stability (Hoffstaedter, & Missbach, 2021; Liu, 2024). These operations often begin through trusted figures, family members, friends, or online contacts; who exploit economic hardship and emotional vulnerability (Nasir, 2022; Rahman, et. al., 2025). What starts as an offer of opportunity quickly becomes a trap, as victims are moved across state lines under the pretence of legitimate employment (Ramli, et. al., 2024) only to be forced into labor or sexual exploitation once their documents are confiscated and their freedom restricted (Angeli & Afrilia, 2025; Rahman, et. al., 2025).

Extracted from: [UPDATED] GOF crackdown exposes elaborate human-smuggling network in Selangor, Melaka. *News Straits Times*

"The advertisements claim Indonesian migrants in Malaysia — estimated at around 1.5 million people — can return home for as little as RM500 per person... a return journey can cost up to RM2,000, depending on the route and number of passengers." (Camoens, 13 Oct, 2025).

Law enforcement records show that domestic service, agricultural labor, and informal entertainment venues are among the most common settings where these abuses occur. The victims are typically young adults from low-income households, with limited education or prior migration experience (Zulkifli, et. al., 2024). They are targeted because their circumstances make them more susceptible to deception and less likely to seek help (Zulkifli, et. al., 2024). Their isolation is deliberate, reinforced by threats, psychological manipulation, and the removal of identity papers that sever ties to their past and block access to support systems (Angeli & Afrilia, 2025).

Between 2020 and 2025, Malaysia experienced a series of notable incidents involving TIPSOM, underscoring its role as both a transit and destination country and reflecting its strategic position in Southeast Asia.

One of the most internationally scrutinized cases was the 2020–2021 forced labour scandal involving Top Glove Corporation, the world's largest rubber glove manufacturer. Investigations revealed that migrant workers, primarily from Nepal and Bangladesh; were subjected to excessive overtime, withheld wages, and cramped living conditions (Mohamed Apandi, 2023). The U.S. Customs and Border Protection issued a Withhold Release Order (WRO) against Top Glove products, citing indicators of forced labour. Although the company took remedial steps, the case highlighted Malaysia's weak oversight of labour trafficking and the need for clearer legal definitions under ATIPSOM (Mohamed Apandi, 2023).

Another major incident occurred in 2022 when Sime Darby Plantation, one of Malaysia's largest palm oil producers, was implicated in labour trafficking allegations. The U.S. Department of Labor flagged the company for exploitative practices including passport retention, abusive working hours, and deceptive recruitment (Mohamed Apandi, 2023). These findings led to import bans on Sime Darby's products in the U.S. market. The Malaysian government responded by launching inspections and revising labour standards, but critics noted that enforcement remained inconsistent. The case underscored the blurred lines between legal employment and trafficking, especially in sectors reliant on migrant labour (Mohamed Apandi, 2023).

In early 2023, a corruption-linked smuggling syndicate involving immigration officers was exposed, marking a rare instance of official complicity in migrant smuggling (The Straits Times, March 25, 2023). Several officers were charged for facilitating the illegal entry of foreign nationals through Malaysia's borders in exchange for bribes. This incident, documented in Malaysia's Annual Country Report on Trafficking in Persons, revealed gaps in inter-agency coordination and the need for stronger internal accountability mechanisms. It also prompted renewed calls for digital border surveillance and ethics training for frontline personnel (MAPO, 2023).

One significant case occurred in February 2025, when the Southeast Brigade of the General Operations Force (PGA) disrupted a human trafficking operation at a hotel in Kelantan. Described in the Malay Mail (February 14, 2025) authorities arrested two smugglers and 20 undocumented migrants, comprising Indian, Myanmar, and Indonesian nationals; who had entered Malaysia through uncharted routes. The raid, part of "Op Taring Wawasan," revealed the use of hotels as temporary holding sites and the involvement of transnational networks. The case was investigated under Section 6(1)(c) of the Immigration Act 1959/63 and Section 26J of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007 (ATIPSOM), underscoring Malaysia's legal framework for addressing such crimes (Malay Mail, February 14, 2025)

In April 2025, Malaysian authorities identified four dominant smuggling gangs; Geng Otong, Geng Halim, Geng Husen Maungdaw, and Geng Syamsol Babi; operating along maritime routes (Nawawi & Fadzil, 2025). These groups, dubbed the "kings of the seas," used small boats and disguised themselves as fishermen to transport migrants through the Straits of Malacca (Nawawi & Fadzil, 2025). Intelligence gathered by the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants Division (D3) revealed that these gangs charged migrants between RM3,000 and RM5,000 per journey, with boat operators earning up to RM1,500 per trip. Since 2023, 12 smuggling syndicates have been dismantled and prosecuted, reflecting intensified enforcement efforts and the need for coordinated inter-agency responses (Nawawi & Fadzil, 2025).

Despite these enforcement successes, systemic challenges persist. The 2025 U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report on Malaysia highlighted ongoing confusion among officials regarding the distinction between trafficking and smuggling. This conflation has impeded victim identification and law enforcement efforts, particularly in cases involving undocumented migrants who may be treated as offenders rather than victims. The report emphasized the need for improved training, clearer legal definitions, and trauma-informed approaches to ensure that victims are properly recognized and protected (U.S. Embassy in Malaysia, 2025).

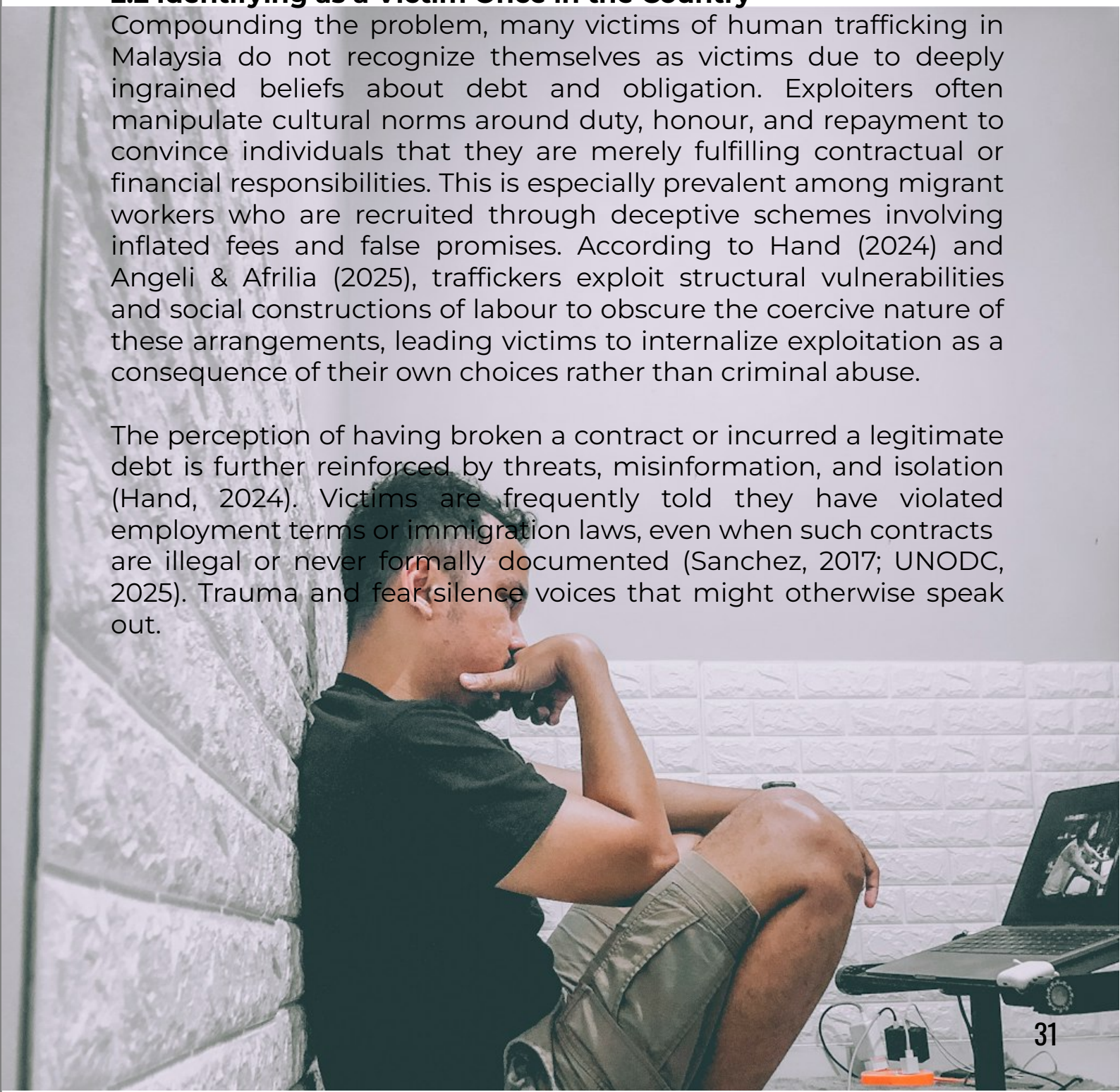
Additionally, Malaysia's porous borders and demand for low-wage labour continue to fuel trafficking risks, especially in sectors like agriculture, construction, and domestic work. Reports from civil

society organizations (Lelliott & Miller, 2023; Transparentem, 2024) have documented cases where migrants were subjected to forced labour, withheld wages, and physical abuse, often under the guise of legal employment. These incidents underscore the importance of strengthening labour inspections, regulating recruitment practices, and expanding victim support services. As Malaysia moves forward, integrating digital surveillance, community-based detection, and survivor-led advocacy will be crucial in addressing the evolving landscape of TIPSOM.

2.2 Identifying as a Victim Once in the Country

Compounding the problem, many victims of human trafficking in Malaysia do not recognize themselves as victims due to deeply ingrained beliefs about debt and obligation. Exploiters often manipulate cultural norms around duty, honour, and repayment to convince individuals that they are merely fulfilling contractual or financial responsibilities. This is especially prevalent among migrant workers who are recruited through deceptive schemes involving inflated fees and false promises. According to Hand (2024) and Angeli & Afrilia (2025), traffickers exploit structural vulnerabilities and social constructions of labour to obscure the coercive nature of these arrangements, leading victims to internalize exploitation as a consequence of their own choices rather than criminal abuse.

The perception of having broken a contract or incurred a legitimate debt is further reinforced by threats, misinformation, and isolation (Hand, 2024). Victims are frequently told they have violated employment terms or immigration laws, even when such contracts are illegal or never formally documented (Sanchez, 2017; UNODC, 2025). Trauma and fear silence voices that might otherwise speak out.



In Malaysia, this tactic is common in domestic work and construction sectors, where victims are denied access to legal recourse or support services. As noted by Gibbons, Chisolm-Straker, and Stoklosa (2023), traffickers use fraud and coercion to create a false sense of agency, making victims believe they are responsible for their circumstances. This psychological manipulation delays recognition and reporting, allowing exploitation to persist undetected.

This misrecognition has serious implications for victim identification and legal protection in Malaysia. When individuals do not self-identify as victims, they are less likely to seek help or cooperate with authorities, and may even be criminalized under immigration or labour laws. Pascual-Leone, Kim, and Morrison (2023) emphasised the importance of trauma-informed approaches in uncovering the psychological barriers that prevent victims from acknowledging their exploitation. In the Malaysian context, integrating culturally sensitive outreach and legal literacy into anti-trafficking efforts is essential to ensure that survivors are recognized, protected, and empowered to reclaim their rights.

Why Smuggled Migrants May Not See Themselves as Victims

- **Perceived Consent and Agency**
  Many migrants willingly pay smugglers to facilitate their journey, believing they are making a personal choice rather than being exploited. This sense of agency can obscure the risks and abuses they encounter, especially when they view the smuggler as a helper rather than a criminal.

- **Debt and Financial Obligation**
  Migrants often incur significant debts to fund their journey and may feel morally or culturally obligated to repay these costs, even if the terms are exploitative. This belief reinforces the idea that they are responsible for their situation, not victims of a crime.

- **Fear of Legal Consequences**
  Smuggled migrants may fear arrest, detention, or deportation if they disclose their status. This fear discourages them from seeking help or reporting abuse, especially in countries where irregular migration is criminalized or stigmatized.

- **Lack of Awareness of Rights and Protections**
  Many migrants are unaware of international protections or national laws that distinguish smuggling from trafficking and offer support to exploited individuals. Without this knowledge, they may not realize they are entitled to assistance or legal remedies.

- **Normalization of Exploitation**
  In some communities, harsh migration experiences—such as overcrowded transport, extortion, or physical abuse—are seen as typical or unavoidable. This normalization makes it harder for individuals to recognize when their rights have been violated or when they've been subjected to criminal exploitation.

Why Trafficking Victims May Not Recognize Their Victimhood

- **Manipulation Through Debt and Contracts**
  Traffickers frequently impose inflated debts or fraudulent contracts, convincing victims they must "repay" recruitment, travel, or living costs. This creates a false sense of obligation, making victims believe they are fulfilling a financial duty rather than being exploited.

- **Normalization of Abuse**
  In some communities or industries, exploitative conditions—such as excessive working hours, withheld wages, or verbal abuse—are seen as normal. Victims may not recognize these as violations, especially if peers are experiencing similar treatment.

- **Fear of Authority or Legal Repercussions**
  Victims may fear arrest, detention, or deportation if they report their situation, particularly if they are undocumented or have been coerced into illegal activities. This fear silences them and reinforces the trafficker's control.

- **Psychological Coercion and Trauma Bonding**
  Traffickers often use emotional manipulation, threats, or intermittent kindness to create dependency and confusion. Victims may feel loyalty, fear, or guilt, believing they chose their circumstances or must protect their exploiter.

- **Lack of Awareness of Legal Rights and Definitions**
  Many victims are unaware of what constitutes trafficking under national or international law. Without clear knowledge of their rights or the legal definition of exploitation, they may not realize they qualify for protection and support.

EXERCISE:

1. What is your opinion about the current situation surrounding TIPSOM?

2. What do you think needs to be done based on the cases examined in this chapter?

3. How would you contribute to this necessary change?

2.3 Challenges in Law Enforcement

Despite growing public awareness and policy reforms, the real-world effectiveness of response systems remains hindered by deep seated institutional weaknesses. These are not isolated failures but interconnected flaws that erode the integrity of interventions at every stage. Without standardised procedures across agencies, documentation becomes inconsistent, responses are delayed, and case paths fragment before reaching resolution. Even well-meant efforts often stall due to the absence of unified protocols.

This problem is worsened by a lack of specialised training tailored to the complex nature of trafficking and smuggling (Hachey & Phillippi, 2017; Farrell, et. al., 2019; Richie-Zavaleta, et. al., 2021). Many personnel in government agencies and NGOs operate without adequate knowledge of trauma informed engagement, signs of coercion, or digital evidence collection linked to transnational networks. As a result, critical windows for early intervention close unnoticed, and vital evidence are mishandled or overlooked. The gap between legal intent and ground level action grows wider, leaving statutes on paper without practical force in the field.

The vulnerability of those affected is further amplified by weak protection systems. Fear of retaliation, distrust in authorities, and limited access to shelter or legal advice discourage cooperation (UNODC, 2025). Many individuals remain hidden not because they are invisible but because the systems meant to protect them fail to inspire confidence. When witnesses see no benefit in speaking up, prosecutions rely on circumstantial evidence, which rarely leads to conviction in complex cases (Nasir, 2022) .

It ought to concern every person, because it is a debasement of our common humanity. It ought to concern every community, because it tears at our social fabric. It ought to concern every business, because it distorts markets. It ought to concern every nation, because it endangers public health and fuels violence and organized crime. I'm talking about the injustice, the outrage, of human trafficking, which must be called by its true name - modern slavery.
Barack Obama

The common patterns underlying TIPSOM demand a response that goes beyond arrests and prosecutions. Effective action requires prevention, protection, and systemic reform working in tandem (Mohamed Apandi, 2024). Regional cooperation has become essential, as trafficking networks rely on cross border mobility and shared infrastructure to survive (UNODC, 2025). International agencies have stressed the need for joint task forces, intelligence sharing, and standardised methods to identify victims consistently across borders (UNODC, 2025; U.S. Embassy in Malaysia, 2025). Yet progress remains uneven due to limited resources, bureaucratic delays, and inconsistent application of protective measures (U.S. Embassy in Malaysia, 2025).

Understanding how these networks function is vital for those on the front lines of detection and intervention. The methods used to recruit, move, and control people follow clear patterns, even as the actors behind them evolve. Recognising these signs is not just a matter of knowledge, it requires vigilance cultivated through exposure to real cases and structured observation. This foundation will be critical as the next sections explore how institutions respond, where failures occur, and what lessons can guide future efforts.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

Resource distribution remains uneven, with priority given to visible crimes over hidden exploitation. Budget limits restrict surveillance capacity, cross border collaboration, and victim support services. Operational units are often understaffed and overburdened, forcing difficult choices that leave high risk cases under resourced. This imbalance reflects broader policy priorities that treat trafficking as secondary to other enforcement goals, despite its severe human cost and expanding scale.

The legal framework itself introduces confusion through overlapping jurisdictions and inconsistent definitions. While national laws provide a foundation, their application varies by region due to differing interpretations and local practices. Judicial backlogs further delay proceedings, allowing suspects to exploit procedural delays to avoid accountability. In some cases, charges are downgraded to lesser offences simply to close files faster, weakening deterrence and sending mixed signals about societal values.

These factors form a complex structure that resists simple fixes. Progress demands more than increased funding or new laws. It requires a fundamental rethinking of how institutions interact, how information flows, and how trust is rebuilt with affected communities. The issue is not merely about enforcement capacity but about restoring legitimacy to the systems designed to uphold justice.

Given these insights, the next key question becomes how legal frameworks can be made more responsive to lived realities. In Chapter 3 we will examine the statutory architecture governing this domain, analysing how international obligations intersect with domestic implementation to shape outcomes on the ground.

2.4 Lessons Learned from Case Studies

This exercise involves group work. There are four scenarios. Select ONE and answer the following questions:

1. Is this a case of trafficking or smuggling? Justify your answer.

2. What indicators suggest this person may be a victim under ATIPSOM?

3. What immediate steps should MCPF members take if they encounter such a case?

SCENARIO 1:
Nora, a 20-year-old woman from Myanmar was recruited online for domestic work in Malaysia. Upon arrival, her passport was confiscated, she worked 16-hour days without pay, had very little privacy and no separate place to sleep. She was threatened with deportation if she complained. After 1 year, she walked out and was later found selling herself on the streets.

SCENARIO 2:
Ayu, a widow with two children, was approached by Siti who is her cousin to work in Malaysia at a saloon. Nora did not have a passport, but Siti claimed it was not an issue and proceeded to arrange everything. Nora was suspicious when Siti took her to a shoddy jetty to go in an unidentifiable boat for the trip. Both were caught just 1km inland from where they crossed the Straits of Malacca.

SCENARIO 3:
Zahid, accepted an offer to work in Dubai. The company arranged his travels but asked Zahid to pay first. He was met by Ali, a representative of the company in KLIA for the flight to Dubai. Zahid was informed to stay at Ali's house while the company arranged for his accommodation. Two weeks later, a raid occurred in that house and Zahid was arrested. Later, it was found that the company was a front for a scam syndicate.

SCENARIO 4:
John, a 16-year-old Malaysian boy ran away from home and went to Singapore. He found a job at a mechanic shop. His employer did not register him as an employee with the relevant authorities, despite statements on his payslip of official deductions. While working on a car, he suffered an accident. John went alone to the nearest hospital as his employer refused to go with him. Police were called to arrest him while he was being treated.

NOTES:

The realities faced by victims call for a shift away from traditional policing toward approaches that blend psychological insight with operational procedure. Signs such as chronic stress, avoidance of eye contact, or rehearsed responses are not mere oddities—they are indicators shaped by prolonged coercion. Training that treats these behaviours as diagnostic signals rather than suspicious anomalies transforms how field personnel interpret human interaction. The most effective interventions have emerged when teams were equipped not only with legal authority but with the ability to recognize emotional distress as a clear cue, not a vague shadow.

Yet these methods remain unevenly applied across regions due to unequal resource distribution and poor interdepartmental communication. Coordination between immigration, labour, and law enforcement agencies frequently breaks down at the point of information sharing, allowing traffickers to exploit bureaucratic silos. In documented cases, victims were passed between agencies without any single entity taking full responsibility for their safety.

This fragmentation in Southeast Asia and elsewhere is not accidental. It is a structural weakness that organized networks anticipate and manipulate. Strengthening collaboration requires more than memoranda or temporary task forces. It demands shared databases, consistent reporting standards, and a culture of mutual accountability that transcends institutional borders.

The gap between policy on paper and practice on the ground is stark. Laws exist to protect, yet their application often depends on the discretion of individual officers who may lack training in trauma-informed engagement. Without standardized guidelines for interviewing vulnerable individuals or protocols for preserving evidence without causing further harm, even well-intentioned actions can compromise justice.

The most successful responses have not come from sweeping legislation but from localized efforts that prioritize dignity over procedure. Those initiatives prove that lasting progress arises when empathy is woven into daily practice, not treated as an optional extra.

Moving forward, the future of our country depends on building systems that learn from each case without repeating past errors. Emerging research highlights the value of feedback loops between frontline workers and policy makers, ensuring that real-world experiences shape regulatory updates. Community-based networks, when properly supported, act as early warning systems more effective than centralized surveillance. Their strength lies in intimate knowledge of local dynamics, insights that cannot be captured in manuals but are lived daily by those who inhabit these communities. The path ahead does not lie in larger raids or harsher penalties but in cultivating resilient ecosystems of vigilance and care, working together despite perceived biases and hurdles for a better Malaysia.

Given these lessons, the critical question becomes: how can institutions restructure themselves to match this evolving understanding? In Chapter 3, we will examine the legal framework designed to address these issues—and how its implementation often falls short of its intended purpose.

NOTES:

3
Legal Framework Overview

3
Legal Framework Overview

3.1 Legislation Against Trafficking and Smuggling

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling in Malaysia has triggered a deliberate and coordinated legal response, shaped by both national urgency and international responsibility. This framework was crafted to confront widespread exploitation in labor and sex sectors, replacing fragmented provisions with a single, comprehensive statute. The law clearly defines prohibited acts, establishes protections for victims, and assigns specific duties to enforcement agencies, creating a unified structure for action.

The legislation does not merely punish offenders but also targets the conditions that allow exploitation to flourish. Penalties include lengthy imprisonment, heavy fines, asset seizure, and the closure of businesses tied to illegal operations. Specialized units were created within law enforcement to handle cases with sensitivity, ensuring psychological trauma is respected and procedural integrity is maintained. These measures aim to dismantle criminal networks while preventing victims from being further harmed by the very systems meant to aid them.

3.2 The Malaysian Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007

The Malaysian Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007 (Act 670), commonly referred to as ATIPSOM, is the country's primary legal framework to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling. It criminalizes all forms of trafficking, including for sexual exploitation, forced labor, and organ removal; as well as the smuggling of migrants for profit. The law outlines specific offences such as trafficking through coercion, fraud, or abuse of power, and includes aggravated penalties for cases involving children, violence, or organized syndicates. It also prohibits profiting from smuggling activities, using fraudulent documents, and harboring trafficked or smuggled individuals.

ATIPSOM also provides mechanisms for victim protection, including temporary shelter, medical care, legal aid, and repatriation support. Victims are not required to participate in criminal proceedings to receive protection, although cooperation may strengthen prosecution efforts. Enforcement powers are granted to designated officers, and the law allows for interagency coordination through the Council for Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants (MAPO). Amendments and SOP revisions between 2022 and 2025 have focused on improving victim identification, expanding trauma-informed care, and strengthening prosecution of complicit officials.

Effective implementation requires collaboration across ministries, courts, and frontline responders. Recent amendments have broadened the law's scope to include digital exploitation, forced marriage, and organ trafficking, bringing domestic standards closer to global benchmarks. Victim support now guarantees access to safe shelter, medical treatment, legal advice, and temporary residency, removing obstacles that once discouraged cooperation with investigations. This evolution marks a shift from reactive punishment to proactive protection, recognizing that justice is incomplete without restoring dignity and safety.

Understanding how these laws function in practice is essential for anyone working in prevention. The rules governing evidence gathering, witness testimony, and interagency coordination are complex and demand strict adherence. Errors in procedure can weaken cases, retraumatize survivors, or allow perpetrators to evade accountability. Training in these protocols enables members of the foundation to contribute meaningfully, not only through direct action but by identifying where legal tools are working well and where gaps persist.

These legal structures do not exist in isolation. They intersect with broader systems of power, migration, and economic inequality. However, legal text alone cannot ensure protection. Success depends on institutional strength, cultural understanding, and enduring political commitment.

The true measure of this framework lies not in conviction rates but in the number of lives rebuilt, families reunited, and cycles of abuse interrupted. Continued efforts must be in place to prevent more lives from being shattered as a result of trafficking and smuggling. As MCPF members examine real cases in later chapters, they will encounter the human reality behind statutes, where policy meets suffering, and every decision carries deep consequence.

For those engaged in this work, familiarity with these laws is not optional, it is essential. The ability to interpret their scope, acknowledge their limits, and advocate for their improvement positions MCPF members as vital bridges between legal theory and lived experience. This landscape continues to evolve, shaped by new threats, demographic changes, and the unwavering voices of those who refuse to be silenced.

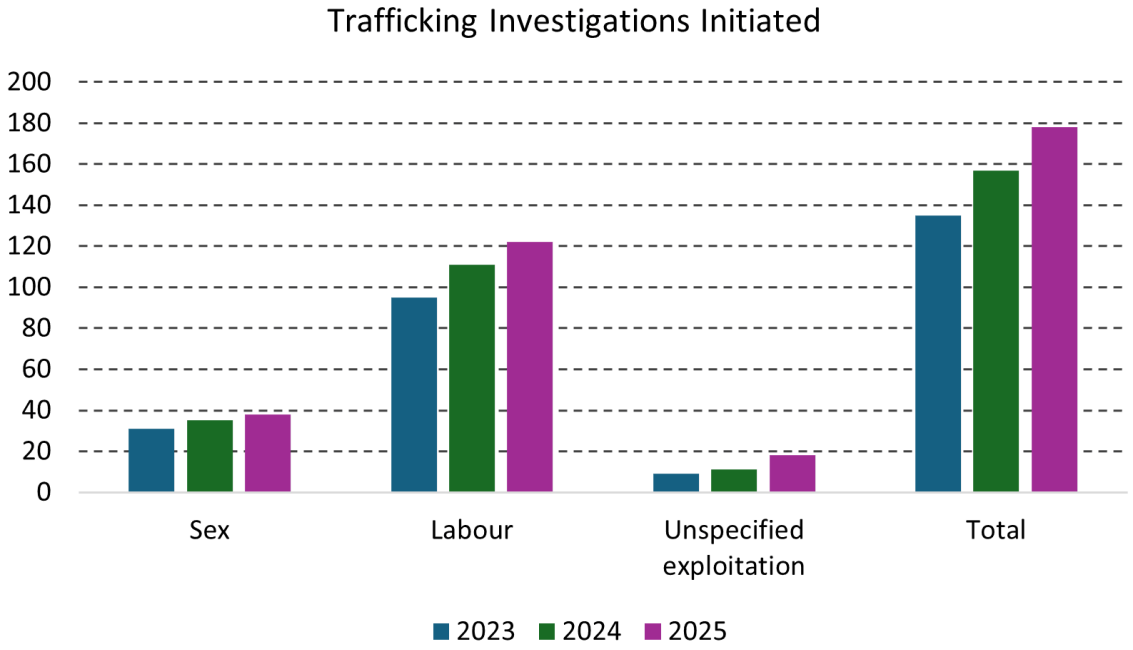
3.3 Justice for Victims

Between 2020 and 2025, Malaysia made steady progress in investigating human trafficking cases (Polis DiRaja Malaysia, 2017, 2020, 2025). According to the U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Reports from 2023 and 2024, the number of investigations increased each year, especially in labour trafficking cases. Authorities began focusing more on sectors like domestic work, palm oil plantations, and glove manufacturing, where exploitation was common. This shows that enforcement agencies are becoming more aware of hidden trafficking patterns and are taking action to uncover them.

However, when it comes to prosecutions initiated by the Attorney General's Chambers (AGC), the numbers were not as strong. While some traffickers were charged, the overall number of prosecutions remained low compared to the number of investigations. In 2024, Malaysia was praised for prosecuting some complicit officials linked to syndicates and increasing the

number of trafficking-specialist prosecutors, but it still failed to prosecute many labour traffickers in high-risk industries. This gap between investigations and prosecutions shows that more legal support and coordination are needed to bring traffickers to justice.

Court convictions improved slightly during this period. The TIP Report 2024 noted that more traffickers received significant jail sentences, especially in labour trafficking cases. This is a positive sign that courts are taking these crimes seriously. Malaysia also increased funding for victim shelters and allowed more freedom of movement for victims staying in government and NGO-run facilities. These steps help victims recover and feel safe enough to participate in legal processes.



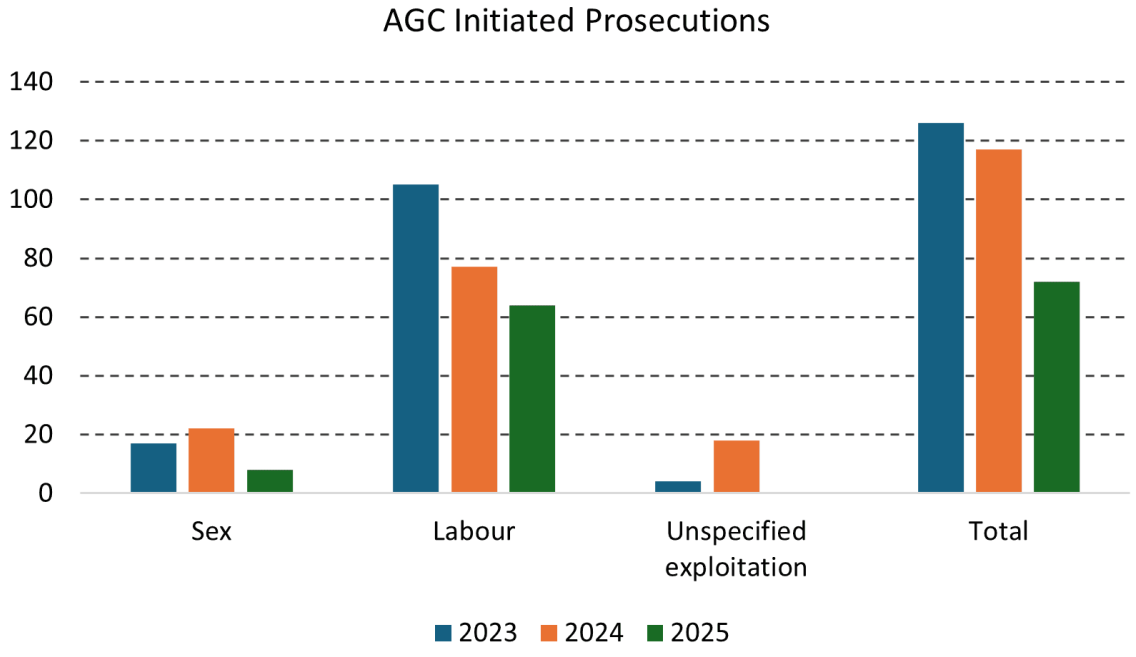
Source: 2022, 2023, 2024, & 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Malaysia

Despite improvements, several challenges remain. Many victims were still required to give formal statements and participate in investigations before they could be officially recognised and receive protection. This discouraged some victims from reporting or staying in Malaysia. Delays in prosecution, weak interagency coordination, and lack of trauma-informed services also made it harder to convict traffickers. To truly improve, Malaysia must simplify victim identification, strengthen legal follow-through, and ensure victims are supported throughout the process.

3.4 A Call for Systemic Improvements

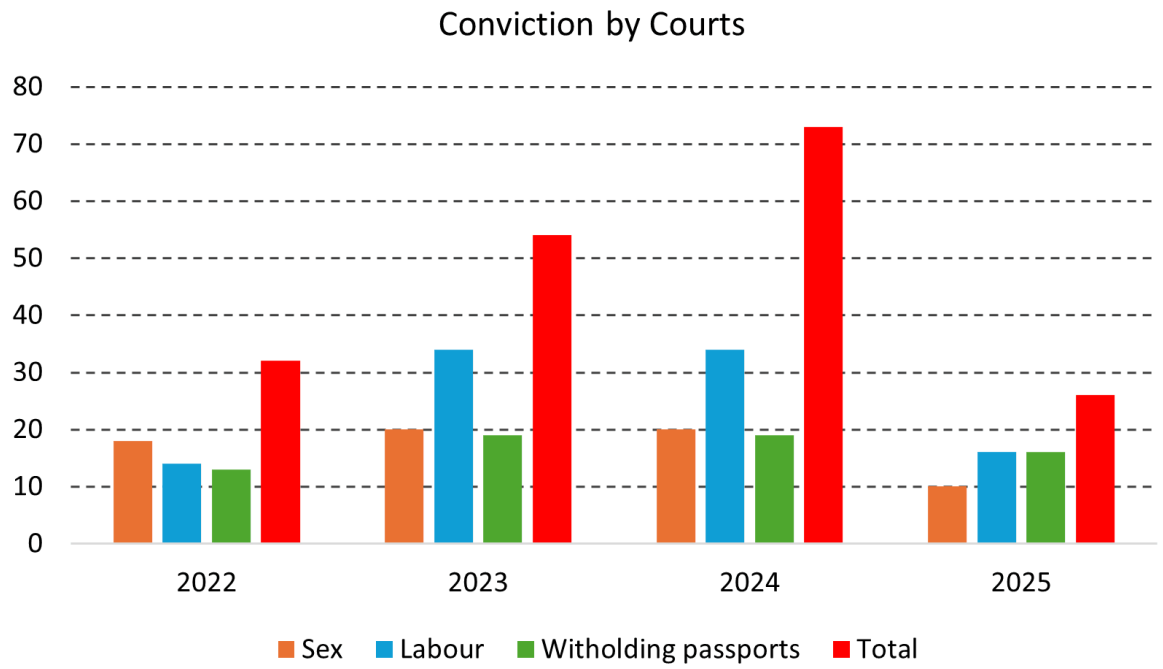
Poor statistics in Malaysia's human trafficking and migrant smuggling (TIPSOM) response, particularly low prosecution and conviction rates; reveal deep structural and operational challenges. While the number of investigations has increased between 2020 and 2025, the gap between cases investigated and those successfully prosecuted remains wide. This suggests that enforcement agencies may be identifying potential cases but failing to gather sufficient evidence, secure victim cooperation, or navigate legal complexities to bring traffickers to justice.

The 2024 TIP Report noted that Malaysia initiated 170 investigations but only secured 38 convictions, highlighting a troubling bottleneck in the justice process. One major implication is the erosion of public and victim trust. When victims see traffickers walk free or cases stall in court, they may be less willing to report abuse or cooperate with authorities. This undermines outreach efforts and perpetuates silence among vulnerable communities.



Source: 2022, 2023, 2024, & 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Malaysia

Additionally, poor conviction rates may embolden traffickers. This is, especially true in high-risk industries like domestic work, agriculture, and manufacturing. The lack of deterrence creates a cycle where exploitation continues unchecked, despite legal frameworks like ATIPSOM being in place.



Source: 2022, 2023, 2024, & 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Malaysia

Another concern is the international perception of Malaysia's commitment to combating trafficking. Although Malaysia was upgraded to Tier 2 in the 2024 U.S. TIP Report, the report emphasised that the country still failed to meet minimum standards in several areas, including victim protection and labour trafficking prosecutions. In the recently released 2025 U.S. TIP Report, Malaysia retains its Tier 2 position. This affects Malaysia's reputation, foreign labour policies, and international funding opportunities. It also places pressure on agencies like MAPO and SUHAKAM to improve coordination, training, and survivor-centered approaches.

3.5 International Treaties and Agreements

Crimes related to TIPSOM do not respect borders, and neither can the response to them. Malaysia's commitment to global instruments like the UN Palermo Protocols and the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons transforms international norms into concreate

legal duties. These agreements are not symbolic gestures but binding frameworks that require states to criminalise exploitation, safeguard vulnerable people, and enable cross border judicial cooperation. Their influence is not abstract. It reshapes how investigations unfold, how evidence is shared, and how victims are identified and helped across jurisdictions.

Operational practices have evolved because of these commitments (International Labour Organization, 2022; M.L. McAuliffe & F. Laczko, 2023; International Justice Mission, 2023), mutual legal assistance treaties, and joint task forces are now standard tools in anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling work. These mechanisms break down the barriers created by national boundaries, allowing authorities to track routes, locate safe houses, and trace financial flows with greater speed and accuracy. Real world cases confirm that when intelligence flows freely between regional partners, rescue operations succeed more often and with fewer delays. The power of these tools lies not in their existence but in their consistent use.

Operation Global Chain (June 2025) (INTERPOL, July 11, 2025)

- Led by Austria and Romania with support from INTERPOL, Europol, and Frontex, Operation Global Chain involved nearly 15,000 officers from 43 countries. It resulted in the identification of 1,194 potential victims and the arrest of 158 suspects. The operation targeted trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced criminality, and forced begging—especially involving underage victims. Countries like Brazil, Thailand, Albania, and Ukraine played key roles in dismantling transnational networks.

Europol's Large-Scale Joint Action Days (LS-JAD) (Europol, 2019)

- In October 2019, Europol coordinated a Large-Scale Joint Action Days against trafficking in human beings (THB), involving 23 EU member states led by Austria and Spain. The operation focused on labor and sexual exploitation and led to 162 arrests, 476 victims identified, and thousands of inspections (individual, vehicles, and locations) across Europe. The success was attributed to real-time intelligence sharing and joint investigations.

The impact extends beyond enforcement. These treaties demand that domestic laws align with internationally accepted definitions of exploitation (Human Rights Watch, 2024). This ensures that victims are recognised consistently, regardless of where they are found, and that offenders face similar consequences under the law. Compliance is reviewed regularly by treaty monitoring bodies, which evaluate not just legal changes but also how well those laws are applied. In Malaysia, this has led to improvements in witness protection, access to legal aid for foreign nationals, and

training standards for frontline staff. The shift is clear, from responding to crimes after they happen to building systems that prevent them.

International cooperation also drives institutional growth. Technical support from global agencies has helped establish specialised units within law enforcement, upgrade data collection systems, and strengthen coordination between ministries. These are not one-time projects but part of a long-term effort to build resilience against new forms of exploitation. The results are visible in rising conviction rates and more uniform application of protective measures across different parts of the country.

As TIPSOM adapts, so must the legal response. New methods of control now emerge through encrypted messaging apps and informal remittance networks (Europol, 2025), hiding exploitation in plain sight. Without updating treaty language and enforcement protocols to include these digital dimensions, existing systems risk becoming ineffective before they reach their full potential. Experts warn that static laws cannot keep pace with dynamic criminals.

This reality demands more than legal compliance. It requires a culture of accountability where every official, from border guards to community volunteers, understands their role in upholding human rights. MCPF members are not passive implementers of policy but active participants in a wider network of protection. Their daily decisions shape how effectively international commitments translate into real safety for victims.

The next step is to see how these obligations play out in courtrooms. In section 3.6, a real Malaysian prosecution case is examined to reveal how international standards meet local justice, exposing both strengths and gaps in the system's ability to deliver accountability.

3.6 Analysis of a Legal Case Study

A legal case is analysed here to improve MCPF members' understanding about the realities that victims face repeatedly and complexities that underly TIPSOM-related court trial.

Former restaurant supervisor held for employee exploitation, says PJ police

PETALING JAYA, June 20, 2021 — Police have arrested a former restaurant supervisor believed to be involved in abusing and exploiting employees at a restaurant in Petaling Jaya, here, on Friday. Petaling Jaya District Police chief ACP Mohamad Fakhrudin Abdul Hamid said the 33-year-old man's activities were uncovered through a Tamil-language video that went viral after being aired by a television station in India last week.

He said that based on translation, an Indian man claiming to be a former employee of the restaurant had narrated his experience of working there and how he was allegedly exploited of his wages as well as being beaten and abused. "He also claimed to have seen his fellow Indian colleague being burnt in the leg by the employer at the restaurant in question", believed to have happened in March last year.

"Police then conducted further investigations and subsequently managed to rescue two Indian male victims, aged 22 and 34, an employee and a former employee of the restaurant," he told reporters at a press conference at the Petaling Jaya District Police Headquarters today.

Mohamad Fakhrudin said the result of further investigation on the two of them later led to the arrest of a local suspect, believed to be a former supervisor at the restaurant, at about 4.30 pm. He said the suspect had six prior records related to crime and drugs and has been remanded for six days from yesterday to June 24.

"This case is being investigated under Section 13 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007 (ATIPSOM) while both victims have been placed in a men's shelter after a 21-day Interim Protection Order (IPO) under Section 44 (2) of the ATIPSOM 2007 was obtained," he added.

**Reference:*
www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/06/20/former-restaurant-supervisor-held-for-employee-exploitation-says-pj-police/1983672

The judicial handling of a severe exploitation case* in Malaysia in 2021 revealed how legal frameworks function under real world constraints. Court records show that prosecutors layered multiple charges to address coercion, forced labor, and the confiscation of identity documents; elements that together formed a complex pattern of abuse. Each charge was carefully aligned with provisions of the Anti Trafficking in Persons and Anti Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007 while adhering strictly to rules governing evidence and procedure. This approach underscored the need for precision in legal drafting when confronting hidden criminal networks.

Significant gaps in witness protection emerged during the trial. Survivors frequently withdrew their testimony due to fear of retaliation or the absence of psychological support. Without secure interim housing or trauma informed interviewing methods, oral accounts lost credibility, even when backed by financial records and mobile communication logs.

Prosecutors relied heavily on digital forensics. Statements from NGO staff were used to fill these evidentiary gaps, highlighting the vital role non state actors play in supplementing official investigations. These challenges demonstrate how institutional weaknesses can alter the course of justice before a verdict is even delivered.

The presiding judge's ruling focused on intent and control as central elements, rejecting interpretations that would have reduced the crime to a simple labour violation. Among others, the court identified patterns of isolation, debt manipulation, and restricted movement as signs of systemic domination. This reasoning aligned with international standards on exploitative labour practices and marked a shift from transactional thinking to structural analysis. The judgment affirmed that exploitation is not defined solely by physical confinement but by the gradual erosion of personal autonomy over time. This interpretation sets a precedent for future cases where psychological coercion is subtle yet equally harmful.

This case exposed deeper friction between legislative intent and operational capacity. While laws exist to punish severe abuse, frontline responders often lack training in evidence collection, chain of custody procedures, or inter agency coordination. In some cases, lack of knowledge and skills in all three vital areas were evident.

Success in this prosecution depended more on the dedication of individual officers than on institutional support systems. Without standardized protocols for collaboration between immigration, labor, and law enforcement agencies, legal outcomes remain inconsistent across regions. This fragmentation weakens public trust and allows traffickers to exploit jurisdictional blind spots.

Moving forward, improving this system requires embedding legal literacy into community-based response networks. Training must extend beyond victim identification to include basic understanding of court processes, rights of the accused, and pathways for survivor testimony. Partnerships with legal aid organizations can bridge the gap between fieldwork and courtroom strategy, ensuring that reports become actionable filings. The next phase of progress does not depend on new laws but on refining how existing tools are applied—with consistency, empathy, and technical rigour.

NOTES:

4

Victimology and Victim Identification

4

Victimology and Victim Identification

4.1 Overview of Victimology

Victimology is the study of people who have been harmed by crime, abuse, or violence. It helps us understand what victims go through, for example: emotionally, physically, and socially; and how they interact with police, courts, and support services. According to Gopalan (2022), victimology also looks at why certain people are more likely to become victims, and how society can better protect and support them. In Malaysia, this means learning how to respond with care and respect when someone has been hurt, especially in cases like domestic violence, human trafficking, or online scams.

In recent years, victimology has focused more on the victim's experience, not just the crime itself. This includes understanding trauma, fear, and the long-term effects of being harmed. Thakur (2025) explains that modern victimology also studies how victims can recover and rebuild their lives, and how support systems (e.g. counseling, shelters, and legal aid) can help. It encourages police, social workers, and community leaders to treat victims with dignity and listen to their stories, rather than blaming or ignoring them.

Technology has created new types of victimization, such as cyberbullying, online fraud, and digital stalking. These crimes can be just as harmful as physical ones, especially when victims feel isolated or ashamed. Victimology helps us understand these modern challenges and find better ways to protect people online. It also shows how digital tools like helplines, apps, and online support groups; can help victims get the help they need quickly and safely (Thakur, 2025).

Victimology also looks at how family, culture, and community affect a victim's experience. In Malaysia, some victims may stay silent because of shame, fear of gossip, or pressure from relatives. Gopalan (2022) stresses that support systems must be sensitive to these cultural issues and offer help in ways that feel safe and

respectful. Victimology is not just about studying victims. It's about making real changes in how we treat them, support them, and prevent future harm.

4.2 Summary of Main Victimology Theories

Victimology is the scientific study of victims and the psychological, social, and legal dimensions of victimisation. Emerging as a distinct field in the mid-20th century, it explores how individuals become victims, the impact of crime on their lives, and the societal responses to their suffering. Victimology examines patterns of vulnerability, the relationship between victims and offenders, and the role of institutions, for example law enforcement, healthcare, and social services; in providing support and justice. It also interrogates broader systemic issues, including power imbalances, cultural stigmas, and policy gaps that shape victim experiences. In contemporary contexts, victimology plays a critical role in informing trauma-informed practices, restorative justice models, and survivor-centered interventions. This is especially important in complex crimes like human trafficking, domestic violence, and migrant exploitation.

Victim Precipitation

Victim precipitation theory suggests that victims may play an active role in the genesis of a crime through behaviours that provoke or invite criminal responses. This concept, originally developed by Wolfgang (1958), has evolved to include both passive and active precipitation. Passive precipitation involves characteristics or behaviours that unknowingly increase vulnerability, while active precipitation includes direct actions that may provoke an offender (Daigle, 2022). In the context of human trafficking, victims may be perceived as precipitating their victimization by engaging in risky migration routes or informal labour markets, often driven by desperation or misinformation. However, scholars (Karmen, 2020; Elisna & Rahim, 2024) caution that this framing must not be used to shift blame onto victims, especially in coercive environments where choice is severely constrained.

In migrant smuggling, victim precipitation may manifest when individuals knowingly engage with smugglers despite awareness of potential risks. For example, Zhang and Sanchez (2021) earlier

highlighted how some migrants, in pursuit of economic opportunity, may ignore red flags or warnings, inadvertently placing themselves in exploitative situations. While this may be interpreted as a form of precipitation, it is critical to contextualize such decisions within structural inequalities, lack of legal migration pathways, and misinformation. The theory thus offers insight into behavioural dynamics but must be applied with ethical caution to avoid victim-blaming.

Victim Facilitation

Victim facilitation (von Hentig, 1948) refers to situations where victims unintentionally make it easier for offenders to commit crimes, often through negligence or lack of awareness. Unlike precipitation, facilitation does not imply provocation but rather highlights how certain behaviours or circumstances, such as leaving valuables exposed or failing to verify employment offers, can increase vulnerability (Daigle, 2022). In human trafficking, facilitation may occur when individuals respond to fraudulent job advertisements or travel offers without verifying legitimacy. Studies show that traffickers often exploit facilitated access through social media and informal networks (Movsisyan, 2018; Chen, Dell & Roesner; 2019; Romanowska, 2024), making digital literacy and awareness critical prevention tools.

Regarding migrant smuggling, facilitation is evident when migrants bypass official channels and rely on informal brokers or community referrals without due diligence. Research by Achilli (2018) found that smugglers often operate within trusted networks, and migrants may facilitate their own exploitation by assuming safety based on shared ethnicity or language. This underscores the importance of targeted outreach and myth-busting campaigns to reduce facilitation risks. While the theory helps identify preventable vulnerabilities, it must be balanced by recognising the systemic barriers that limit safe choices for migrants and trafficking victims.

Victim Provocation

Victim Provocation Theory (von Hentig, 1948) posits that a victim may incite or trigger a criminal act through aggressive or antagonistic behaviour. It is the most controversial of the victimology theories, as it implies a high level of victim responsibility. Provocation differs from precipitation in its intensity

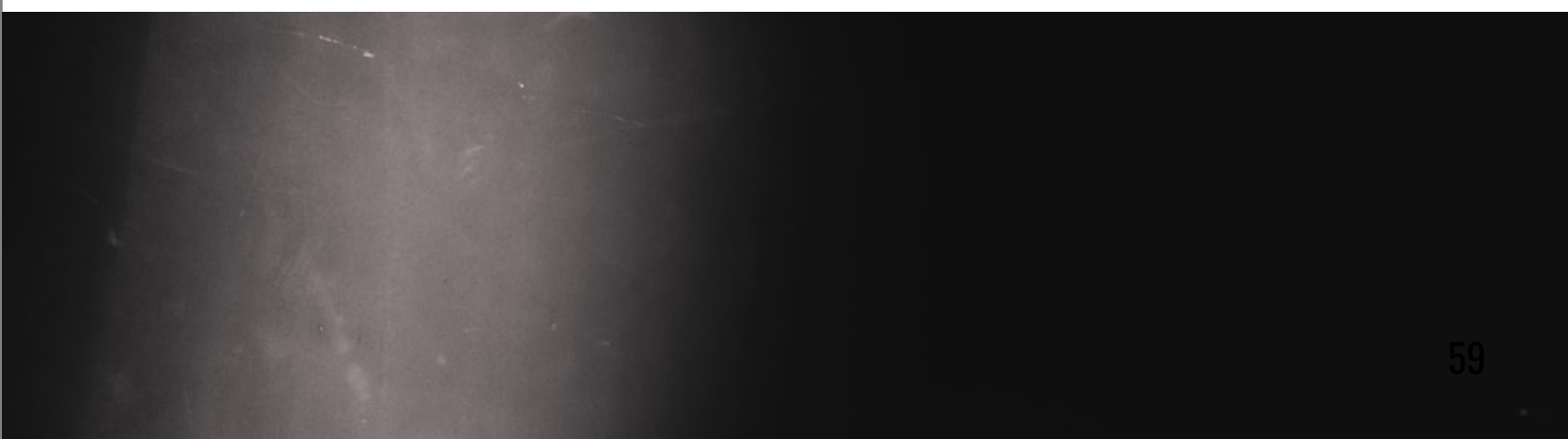
and intentionality, suggesting that the victim's actions directly led to the offense (Karmen, 2020). In trafficking contexts, this theory is rarely applicable due to the coercive and manipulative nature of the crime. However, in certain smuggling scenarios, provocation may arise during disputes over payment, route changes, or treatment, where victims confront smugglers and escalate tensions (Zhang & Sanchez, 2021).

Despite its limited relevance to trafficking, Victim Provocation Theory (von Hentig, 1948) can inform law enforcement training on conflict dynamics in smuggling cases. For instance, when migrants resist exploitation or demand better conditions, smugglers may retaliate violently. Understanding these interactions helps frame victim behaviour not as culpable but as reactive to abuse. It is emphasised here that provocation must be interpreted within power imbalances and survival contexts, especially in crimes involving vulnerable populations (Achilli, 2018). Thus, although the theory offers insight into interpersonal triggers, its application in trafficking and smuggling must be critically examined.

4.3 Who are Victims?

The term 'victim' is not explicitly covered in Malaysia's Penal Code (Act 574). However, according to the Domestic Violence Act 1994 (Act 521) "victim" means a victim of domestic violence.

According to the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, adopted on 29 November 1985, by General Assembly resolution 40/34, "victims" means: *"...persons who, individually or collectively, have suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that are in violation of criminal laws operative within Member States, including those laws proscribing criminal abuse of power".*



A person may be considered a victim, under this Declaration, regardless of whether the perpetrator is identified, apprehended, prosecuted or convicted and regardless of the familial relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. The term "victim" also includes, where appropriate, the immediate family or dependents of the direct victim and persons who have suffered harm in intervening to assist victims in distress or to prevent victimization.

The provisions contained therein shall be applicable to all, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, age, language, political or other opinion, cultural beliefs or practices, property, birth or family status, ethnic or social origin, and disability.

Other than Act670, the term 'victim' is covered in the Domestic Violence Act 1994 (Act 521), Penal Code (Act 574), Child Act 2001 (Act 611), and the Criminal Procedure Code (Act 593). These various legislations enable victims to seek justice and support under different contexts. A summary is shown below.

1. Domestic Violence Act 1994 (Act 521)

- **Section 2 – Interpretation**
  This section defines “victim” in the context of domestic violence. It includes individuals who suffer harm or are placed in fear due to acts committed by a family member. Victims may be spouses, former spouses, children, or incapacitated adults living in the same household.

“Victim” includes a person who is compelled to seek alternative residence due to domestic violence.

2. Penal Code (Act 574)

- While the Penal Code does not explicitly define “victim,” it implies victimhood through sections that describe harm, injury, or exploitation—such as:
  - **Section 375 – Rape**
  - **Section 319–326 – Hurt and grievous hurt**
  - **Section 339–348 – Wrongful restraint and confinement**

3. Child Act 2001 (Act 611)

- **Section 17 – Child in need of protection and rehabilitation**
  Defines children as victims when exposed to abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

A child is considered a victim if subjected to physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or trafficking.

5. Criminal Procedure Code (Act 593)

- While not defining “victim” directly, it includes provisions for victim compensation and testimony, especially in cases involving sexual crimes and domestic violence.

4.4 Characteristics of Victims

Those caught in human trafficking often come from environments where systemic failures have stripped away access to safety, education, and economic stability (Angeli & Afrilia, 2025). Victims' vulnerabilities are not accidental but the result of deep structural gaps that make them easy targets for exploitation. Recognising these patterns enables frontline responders to foresee where and how coercion may take hold.

Mobility plays a central role in this dynamic. Whether driven by choice or necessity, displacement increases exposure to manipulation (UNODC, 2025). Many are lured by promises of work or family reunion, only to find themselves trapped in conditions from which escape seems impossible. Without legal status or social support, isolation becomes a tool of control. These realities are not limited to remote borders; they unfold in cities and villages alike, often concealed behind ordinary facades (Pascual-Leone, Kim, & Morrison, 2023; Zulkifli, et. al., 2024).

The psychological impact of sustained control leaves clear marks in behaviour and communication. Individuals may avoid eye contact, speak in rehearsed tones, or respond with delayed hesitation (Pascual-Leone, Kim, & Morrison, 2023). These are not signs of deceit, but survival mechanisms forged under pressure. Trauma reshapes how people relate to authority, turning trust into a rare and risky commodity (Nasir, 2022). Those who have endured repeated harm often carry shame that silences them even when help is near.

These traits do not exist alone. They are layered and reinforced by intersecting risks, for example poverty, lack of documentation, and limited access to justice. Children, women, and migrant workers are disproportionately affected in several ways, though no group is exempt. The convergence of these factors creates fertile ground for predatory systems to operate. Understanding this interplay is the first step toward breaking their hold.

These conditions are not passive outcomes. They are actively cultivated by exploiters who target weaknesses in social safety nets, legal ambiguity, and cultural stigma. Their methods depend on predictability, that being choosing are those least likely to be heard or protected. What appears as quiet compliance may be conditioned submission. What seems like indifference may be emotional withdrawal. Recognising these subtleties requires more than observation; it demands thoughtful interpretation.

Von Hentig's (1948) typology offers a foundational framework for understanding victim susceptibility, which remains relevant for initiatives like TIPSOM in identifying and protecting vulnerable individuals. His approach emphasized that victimisation is not random. There are certain personal, social, and psychological traits can increase a person's risk of being targeted (Von Hentig, 1948). Below is how several of von Hentig's (1948) categories align with TIPSOM's focus on human trafficking and exploitation in Southeast Asia.

1. The Young
Children and adolescents are especially vulnerable due to their emotional immaturity, dependence on adults, and limited understanding of risk. In the TIPSOM context, this includes runaway youth, stateless children, and those in informal labour or domestic work. Traffickers often exploit their trust or lack of legal protection, especially in border regions or refugee settlements.

2. The Female
Von Hentig (1948) identified women as a high-risk group due to societal power imbalances and gender-based vulnerabilities. For TIPSOM, this includes migrant women working in domestic, hospitality, or entertainment sectors who may face sexual exploitation, coercion, or debt bondage. Cultural stigma and fear of shame often prevent them from seeking help, making trauma-informed outreach essential.

3. The Immigrant and Minority
Migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities often lack legal status, language fluency, or community support. These factors make them prime targets for traffickers. In Malaysia, undocumented workers from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Indonesia; may be lured with false job promises or trapped in exploitative conditions. Von Hentig's(1948) typology helps TIPSOM teams recognize how marginalization increases vulnerability.

4. The Depressed or Mentally Disturbed
Individuals with psychological distress, trauma history, or cognitive impairments are more susceptible to manipulation and control. TIPSOM responders may encounter victims with untreated mental health issues who are coerced into trafficking networks through emotional dependency or spiritual fear (e.g., juju rituals). Recognizing these traits is key to providing appropriate care and avoiding misidentification.

No single sign confirms victimisation. However, clusters of indicators point to urgent need for attention or rescue. The challenge lies not in spotting one clear signal but in reading a pattern shaped by fear, exhaustion, and deception. This demands both precision and humanity. Your role is not to diagnose but to observe, record, and refer. The next section explore the root causes that make certain populations more susceptible, revealing how poverty, migration status, and institutional neglect combine to enable exploitation.

Understanding these origins sharpens your ability to act before harm deepens. It transforms recognition from guesswork into informed action. By seeing the full picture, not just individual behaviours but the systems that sustain them, you become part of a response that does not merely react but prevents.

"We cannot rely upon the silenced to tell us they are suffering"
Hanan Ashrawi

4.5 Vulnerabilities and Risk Factors

These conditions do not stem from merely personal shortcomings but from deep seated structural inequalities within Southeast Asia that leave certain groups exposed to exploitation. Economic exclusion, lack of access to stable work, and weak social protections create environments where coercion can take hold with little resistance. Global reports confirm that individuals without legal status or reliable documentation face far greater risk of falling into predatory networks, especially in areas where oversight is inconsistent or absent (UNODC, 2025). The absence of safeguards is not consent, but a failure of systems meant to protect the vulnerable.

This vulnerability is worsened by cultural and institutional barriers that silence those in need. In some instances, cultural practices may influence how a person responds to offenders' approach, enabling easier trafficking or smuggling. Fear of deportation, mistrust of officials, and language isolation often prevent people from seeking help, even when they know their situation is harmful. Psychological control, such as threats to family members or the seizure of identity papers; is not random cruelty but a deliberate strategy to deepen dependence. These tactics are especially effective among those lured by false promises of opportunity, turning hope into a trap.

Based on recent peer-reviewed research (Hand, 2024; Ionaşcu & Lup, 2025; Peras, et. al., 2025), here are seven personality traits commonly associated with individuals vulnerable to TIPSOM.

1. **Low self-esteem**
   Individuals with poor self-worth or low self-esteem may believe they deserve mistreatment or feel powerless to resist coercion. This trait is often linked to prior trauma or neglect.

2. **High emotional dependency**
   Victims who seek affection, approval, or belonging are more likely to trust traffickers posing as romantic partners or protectors. Traffickers and smugglers exploit emotional needs through grooming and false promises.

3. **Social isolation**
   People with weak social ties or limited community support are easier to control and less likely to seek help. Severe victims of cyber and relational victimization often report poor social self-concept and loneliness.

4. **Impulsivity or risk-taking**
   Youth or displaced individuals who act impulsively, without fully considering consequences may be drawn into dangerous migration or trafficking situations.

5. **Fearfulness or submissiveness**
   Victims who avoid conflict or have been conditioned to obey authority may comply with traffickers' demands out of fear or obligation. Trauma survivors often exhibit submissive behaviour, making them easier to manipulate.

6. **Negative affect (e.g., anxiety, sadness)**
   Persistent emotional distress can impair judgment and increase vulnerability to coercion or manipulation. Severe victims showed high levels of negative affect, which correlated with poor psychosocial outcomes.

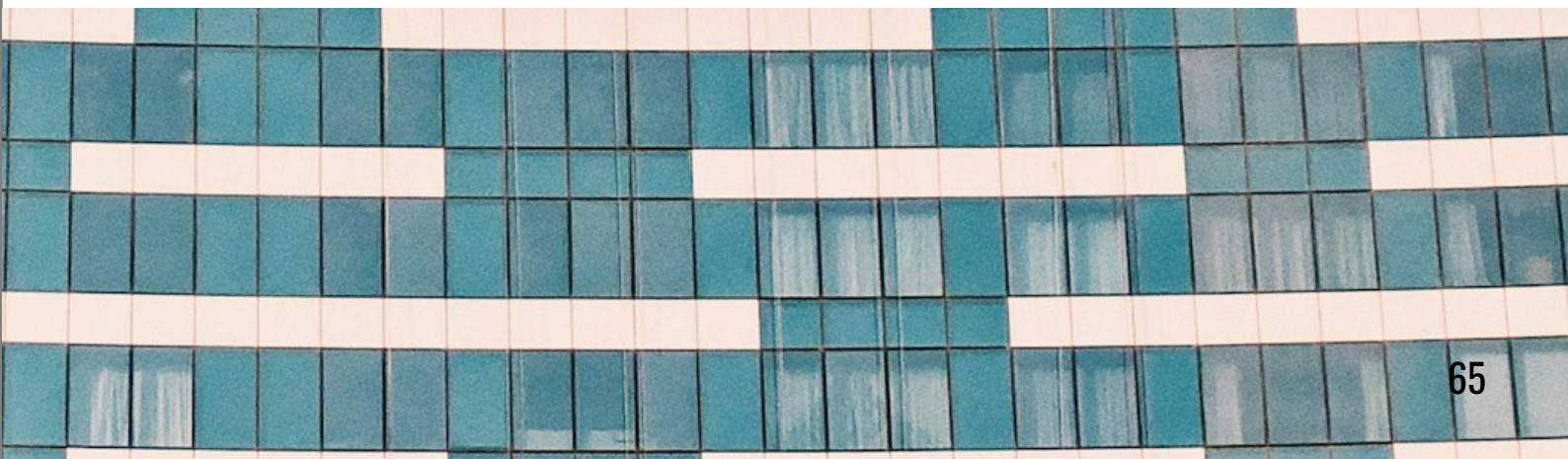
7. **Cognitive dissonance or denial**
   Some victims may rationalise or minimize their exploitation due to shame, fear, or cultural pressure. Internalized stigma and denial can delay help-seeking and reinforce victim silence.



The risks are intensified by identity based factors such as gender, age, and disability. Women and girls are disproportionately targeted for forced labour and sexual exploitation due to longstanding inequalities in education and economic power (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2023; Council for Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants, 2023). Children without guardians or access to schooling are frequently recruited through deceptive offers of care or employment (Farrell, et. al., 2019). People with disabilities face compounded dangers when support services are inaccessible or when those entrusted with their care become sources of abuse. These layers of risk do not simply add together. They multiply, closing off every possible path to safety.

In Malaysia, these patterns mirror broader regional trends documented by international agencies. Migrant workers arriving through informal routes often surrender their documents upon entry (Lelliott, & Miller, 2023), leaving them open to wage theft, confinement, and physical harm with no legal recourse. Even when laws exist on paper, gaps in implementation, such as slow victim identification or lack of interpreter services; undermine their purpose. These are not minor oversights; they are systemic flaws that allow exploitation to continue unchecked.

Tackling these issues demands more than reactive responses. It requires proactive systems that anticipate danger before it occurs. Strengthening community-based monitoring, expanding outreach to informal work sectors, and embedding trauma informed practices into public services can build early warning networks. Training frontline workers, not just in policing but also in health, education, and social care; to spot subtle signs of distress is essential. The goal is not to make every citizen an investigator but to cultivate a culture of care rooted in institutional duty and human empathy. MCPF are the bricklayers for this cultivation.



Looking ahead, the most effective solutions will combine data driven analysis with local insight. Mapping migration routes, studying labour demand in high-risk industries, and tracking recruitment patterns online offer new tools for prevention. Collaboration between civil society, business leaders, and government must shift from occasional coordination to sustained partnership. This fight demands more than awareness—it needs adaptive systems that evolve as quickly as the criminals who exploit human weakness.

4.6 Recognising Victim Signals

Controlled simulations reveal subtle yet consistent signs of distress that often escape notice in everyday settings. These include extended silence, avoidance of eye contact, and body postures that suggest withdrawal or self-protection. Such responses are not random; they reflect psychological adaptations formed under prolonged coercion. These patterns appear across diverse cultures, pointing to a universal expression of trauma under duress.

Micro Expressions

Micro expressions and body language are powerful, often subconscious forms of non-verbal communication that reveal a person's true emotions, intentions, or psychological state; especially when verbal responses are guarded or rehearsed. In victim identification, particularly within trauma-informed frameworks like Malaysia’s TIPSOM initiative, these cues can be critical for detecting distress, fear, or manipulation.

Micro expressions are fleeting facial movements that occur involuntarily and last less than half a second (Malik & Singh, 2023; Zhang & Chai, 2024). They reflect genuine emotions that a person may be trying to conceal. Common micro expressions include:

- **Fear:** Wide eyes, raised eyebrows, slightly open mouth
- **Disgust:** Wrinkled nose, raised upper lip
- **Sadness:** Drooping eyelids, downturned mouth corners
- **Anger:** Furrowed brows, tight lips, glaring eyes
- **Surprise:** Raised eyebrows, wide eyes, dropped jaw

Body Language

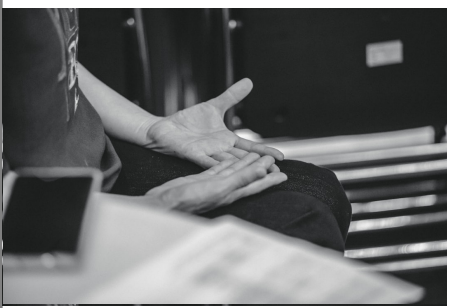
Body language encompasses posture, gestures, movement, and spatial behaviour. In victim support contexts, key indicators include:

- **Avoidance:** Turning away, crossed arms, leaning back
- **Hypervigilance:** Constant scanning of surroundings, stiff posture
- **Submission or fear:** Shrinking posture, lowered head, minimal movement
- **Distress or anxiety:** Fidgeting, nail-biting, foot tapping, clenched fists
- **Trust or openness:** Relaxed shoulders, steady eye contact, leaning forward

Understanding these cues requires cultural sensitivity. For example, avoiding eye contact may signal respect in some Malaysian communities, not necessarily fear. Therefore, training must integrate both universal and culturally specific interpretations to avoid misreading signals.

Identifying victims' signals and cues is a foundational skill in Malaysia's efforts to combat TIPSOM. Under the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007 (ATIPSOM), frontline responders including law enforcement, NGOs, and social workers; are tasked with distinguishing between victims of trafficking and smuggled migrants, who may initially appear similar. Victims often do not self-identify due to fear, trauma, or manipulation, making behavioural observation a critical tool. Signals may include non-verbal cues like flinching, avoiding eye contact, or hypervigilance, as well as verbal indicators such as vague responses, rehearsed phrases, or reluctance to speak about their circumstances.

The deliberate suppression of communication by those in control further complicates recognition. Individuals under such conditions may give rehearsed answers, offer inconsistent stories, or show extreme deference to accompanying figures. These are not indicators of dishonesty but learned survival strategies shaped by fear and isolation. Observers must differentiate between ordinary nervousness and the deeper imprint of systemic control, which lacks the volatility of typical anxiety.




This exercise requires disciplined focus on micro expressions and bodily rhythms rather than reliance on stereotypes or assumptions. A trembling hand, a sudden flinch at movement, or an unnatural stillness may signal more than discomfort—they can reflect conditioned reactions to threat. Training participants to detect these cues means moving beyond textbook definitions to engage with the lived reality of those affected. The aim is not to diagnose but to notice what remains hidden in plain sight.

These methods are rooted in empirical research (Yang, 2024; Kuzmanov, 2025; Theologi, 2025), which confirm that victims rarely display dramatic signs of abuse. Instead, the most reliable markers are quiet, cumulative, and context dependent (Yang, 2024). The absence of autonomy in decision making, the inability to speak freely, and reluctance to engage with authority figures are far more telling than visible injuries. Such circumstances demand a shift from passive observation to proactive sensitivity.

When applied in real world settings, these skills reduce misidentification and increase the likelihood of appropriate intervention (Malik & Singh, 2023). The ethical imperative is not to assume victimhood but to create space for truth to emerge without pressure. This approach respects dignity while remaining alert to the silent signals embedded in behaviour. It transforms passive watching into responsible awareness, aligning professional duty with human compassion.

As this field advances, emerging data shows that digital surveillance and algorithmic profiling are beginning to support human observation in identifying high risk environments. Yet no technology can replace the nuanced judgment of a trained observer attuned to the subtleties of human interaction. The future of protection lies in combining technological tools with deeply human skills—skills that cannot be automated but must be cultivated through repeated, thoughtful practice.

The “how” of identifying signals and cues involves a combination of active listening, cultural sensitivity, and trauma-informed interviewing. Responders are trained to create safe environments, avoid leading questions, and observe inconsistencies in body language and speech. In Malaysia’s multi-ethnic and multilingual

context, this also means recognizing when language barriers or social taboos may inhibit disclosure. For instance, survivors from conservative communities may avoid discussing sexual violence directly, instead referencing “shame” or “family problems.” Understanding these coded expressions is essential for accurate victim identification and appropriate intervention.

EXERCISE:
Victim Behaviour Observation Simulation

There are several scenario options for MCPF members to practice their knowledge and skills. The purpose is to educate MCPF members on the realities behind criminal actions as well as the need for victim support and trauma-informed approach.

Open the first video link for reference. Watch any of the remaining video links. At the end, spend some time on filling in the observation sheet shown in the next page.

Disclaimer: These videos are for educational purposes only.

*CAUTION is advised. The interviews may trigger or affect viewers. If that arises, please stop viewing. Seek counseling help if needed.

First link:
http//www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jwUXV4QaTw
Former FBI agent breaks down the various ways we communicate non-verbally.

Other links:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNV2jzVV4iQ

www.youtube.com/shorts/Emb3j-Q-BbY

www.youtube.com/shorts/VPHmOhp_YUs

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Azz-lmYjv74
(skip to 2.00 mins)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpgDPwo64lo

OBSERVATION SHEET – Victim Signals & Cues

Observer Name: _____ Date: _____
Case Observed: _____

1. Verbal Cues (tick all that apply):
[ ] Hesitation or vague responses
[ ] Rehearsed or scripted phrases
[ ] Inconsistent story details
[ ] Apologizing frequently
[ ] Avoidance of specific topics

2. Non-Verbal Cues (tick all that apply):
[ ] Avoids eye contact
[ ] Fidgeting or rocking
[ ] Flinching or startled reactions
[ ] Protective body language (e.g., crossed arms)
[ ] Signs of fatigue or distress

3. Emotional Indicators:
Describe any emotional states observed (e.g., fear, shame, confusion):

_____

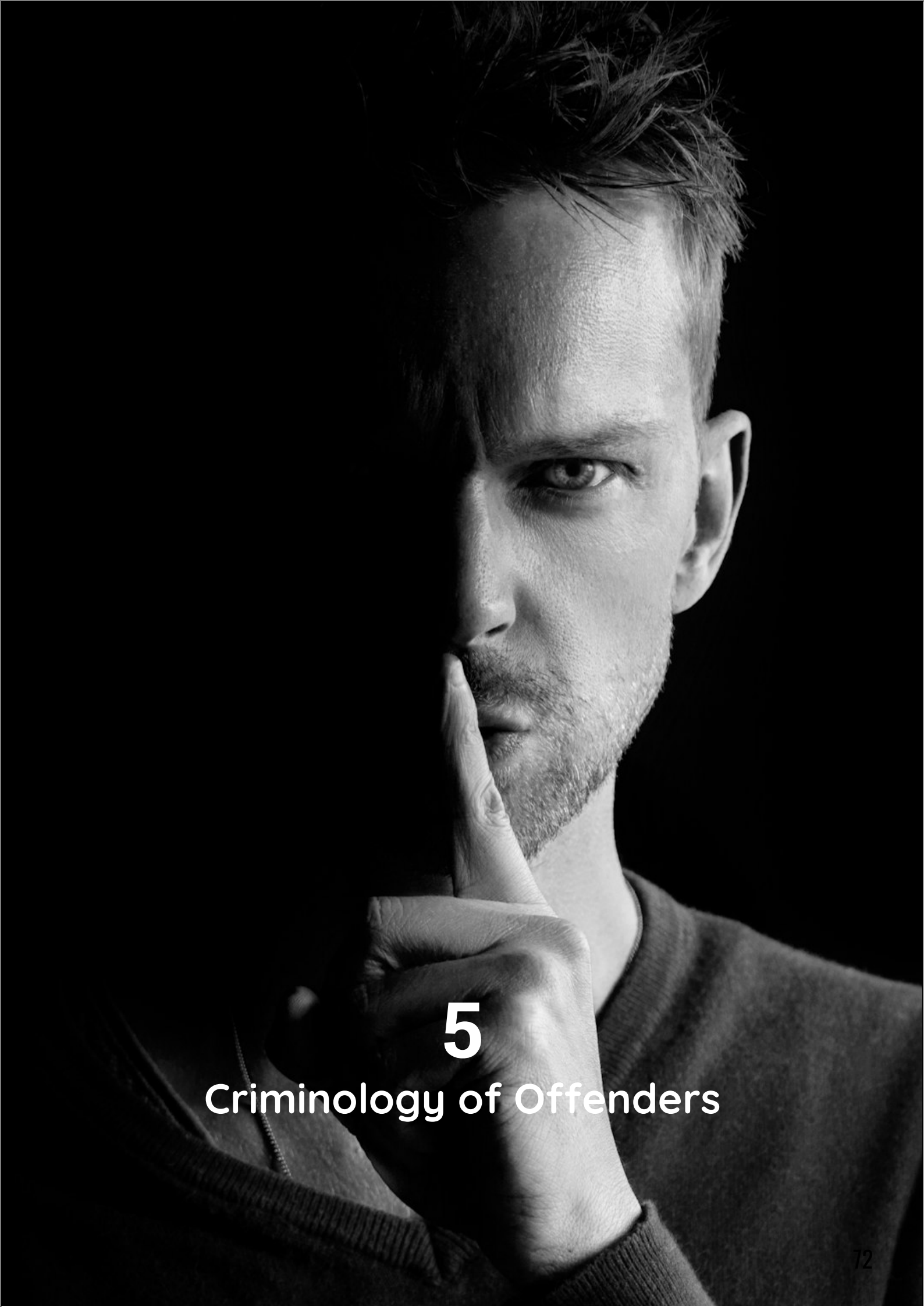
4. Trust Indicators:
Did the individual show signs of trust or openness? What helped or hindered this?

_____

5. Observer Reflection:
What assumptions did you make? What would you do differently?

_____

Comments:



5
Criminology of Offenders

5
Criminology of Offenders

5.1 Overview of Criminology

Criminology is the study of crime, why people commit it, and how society responds to it. This field helps us understand not just the actions of criminals, but also the social, economic, and psychological reasons behind those actions. Criminologists look at patterns in crime, such as who is most likely to be affected, where crimes happen, and how laws and policing can prevent future harm. According to Wei et al. (2025), criminology also explores how the environment, like poor housing or lack of education, can influence criminal behaviour.

In Malaysia, criminology is important for improving public safety and guiding law enforcement. It helps police and policymakers understand which communities are most at risk and what types of crimes are increasing. For example, recent studies have looked at how technology affects crime, such as online scams or cyberbullying. Thomas (2025) found that using CCTV cameras in public areas can help solve cases faster, showing how criminology supports practical solutions for crime prevention.

Criminology also looks at how people who commit crimes can change. This includes studying rehabilitation programmes, prison systems, and community support (Amigoni & Bonnin, 2025). Jasni, Ah, & Nasir (2020) and Nee, Singh, & Kularajasingam (2022) opined that understanding the life stories of offenders, such as poverty, trauma, or peer pressure; can help design better programmes to stop repeat offenses. In Malaysia, this means creating support systems that help former offenders find jobs, reconnect with families, and avoid falling back into crime.

Another part of criminology is studying how victims are affected. This includes emotional trauma, fear, and how they interact with the justice system. Quinney et al. (2025) found that when victims understand the truth behind a crime, they may feel more empathy and lead to healing during mediation. In Malaysia, this supports the use of restorative justice, where victims and offenders meet in safe settings to talk and find closure.

Finally, criminology helps us think critically about laws and justice. It asks whether our laws are fair and whether they protect everyone equally. Ahmad Effendy and Md. Said (2025) argue that while community involvement in crime prevention is important, it must follow legal guidelines to avoid vigilantism. Criminology gives us tools to balance safety, fairness, and human rights, making it a vital part of building a just society in Malaysia.

5.2 Understanding Offender Motivations

The networks that exploit vulnerable people do not operate by accident or chaos. They are carefully constructed systems designed to maximize profit while avoiding detection. These operations flourish where oversight is weak, legal consequences are unpredictable, and demand for cheap labor or sexual services remains steady across borders. Their persistence is not random but rooted in a combination of economic opportunity, psychological manipulation, and institutional failure that allows exploitation to continue with little risk.

Participants in these networks often justify their actions through rationalisations that separate their behavior from criminal intent. According to Amigoni and Bonnin (2025), many view their involvement as a response to limited options rather than as deliberate wrongdoing. Offenders frame their choices as adaptations to hardship or as participation in ordinary economic activity, not as violations of moral or legal norms (Durairaja, et. al., 2019). This mindset aligns with established criminological theories that explain how individuals make decisions under pressure, interpreting their conduct as necessary survival rather than intentional harm (Gibbons, et. al., 2023; Liu, 2024; Amigoni & Bonnin, 2025).

These systems rely on organisational designs (Sanchez, 2017; Lelliott & Miller, 2023) that divide responsibilities, obscure accountability, and shield leaders from direct involvement in abusive acts. By splitting tasks into small, isolated roles, the network ensures that no single person fully understands the scope of the harm being done (Lelliott & Miller, 2023; Zulkifli, et. al., 2025). This fragmentation reduces internal resistance and increases efficiency. What might be seen as morally unacceptable becomes routine when broken into mundane duties performed without awareness of the larger consequences.

The absence of strong deterrence in key transit and destination areas further enables these networks to operate with confidence (UNODC, 2025). When penalties are rare, investigations are slow, and witness protection is inadequate, the balance of risk and reward heavily favors continuation. Offenders depend not on violence alone but on systemic weaknesses (Durairaja, et. al., 2019; Jasni, et. al., 2020; Liu, 2024) including gaps in law enforcement, poor coordination between agencies, and lack of public awareness; to sustain their activities over time.

Global mobility, digital communication, and evolving labour markets have expanded the reach and complexity of these operations (UNODC, 2025). Networks now embed themselves within legitimate industries such as agriculture, construction, and domestic work. In this manner, perpetrators and syndicates blend illegal practices with lawful commerce. This integration makes detection harder because exploitation is hidden behind

seemingly normal business transactions. Recognizing these patterns requires looking beyond obvious signs to understand how criminal intent is masked within everyday economic activities.

Understanding this reality demands more than surface level observation. It requires examining the deeper forces that sustain these systems over years or even decades (Zulkifli, et. al., 2025). The endurance of trafficking networks stems from the interaction between individual choices and broader social conditions for example poverty, inequality, weak governance, and market distortions (Hoffstaedter & Missbach, 2021; INTERPOL, 2025) that create fertile ground for exploitation. Each reinforces the other, making disruption difficult without coordinated, multi-level intervention (Asian Development Bank (2023).

These conditions do not arise in isolation. They are sustained by long standing patterns of marginalization, governance failures, and economic imbalances that leave certain populations exposed and vulnerable (Human Rights Watch, 2024; UNODC, 2025). The next section explores the profiles of those who lead and participate in these networks, revealing how personal histories and social contexts shape their roles. This analysis will provide critical insight into how these actors are recruited, how they maintain control, and how prevention efforts can be better targeted to disrupt their operations before harm occurs.

5.3 Intersection of Factors Underlying Criminality

Summarising from the available research and reports, human trafficking and migrant smuggling are driven by a wide range of actors, each shaped by opportunity, systemic failure, and deliberate exploitation. Perpetrators operate across scales, from solitary offenders using personal ties to highly organised networks spanning multiple countries. Among others, their methods exploit legal loopholes, economic hardship, and social isolation to gain control over vulnerable people (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2023). These operations are not random; they are calculated, adaptable, and deeply rooted in local and cross-border environments.

Perpetrators often use deception as their primary tool (Hachey & Phillippi, 2017; Gibbons, et. al., 2023). They promise jobs, false relationships, improved lifestyles, or community support to lure victims into situations of control. Coercion is rarely obvious at first. Instead, it creeps in through psychological pressure, isolation, and the slow erosion of autonomy (Europol, 2025). What begins as a seemingly harmless interaction, for example a job offer, a romantic connection, or a helping hand; gradually transforms into captivity. This subtle shift makes early detection difficult without trained awareness and careful observation.

Other factors include systemic factors. Institutional weaknesses and corruption enable these networks to thrive (Hoffstaedter & Missbach, 2021). Some officials accept bribes, issue fake documents, or simply ignore signs of abuse. Border guards, police officers, and local administrators may turn a blind eye in exchange for money or favour. When those meant to protect become complicit, systems designed to prevent crime instead facilitate it. This reality demands a fundamental reassessment of how resources are deployed and how oversight is enforced.

The nature of these operations varies across Malaysia's regions. In cities, traffickers often hide behind legitimate businesses, such as recruitment agencies, restaurants, or transport firms. In rural areas, networks are smaller and rely on family ties, local reputation, and community trust. Maritime routes are now commonly used to avoid land checkpoints.

"Just imagine what would happen if your daughter was standing there. What would you do, how would you fight? So you have to join hands, you have to take each child as your daughter. Soon you will feel their sorrow and then you will feel the strength that comes out of you to protect them."

Anuradha Koirala

Incidents underlying TIPSOM are getting more layered. Digital platforms now play a central role in recruitment, advertising, and payment. Advances in technology has made these operations more efficient but also harder to trace, as identities are masked and transactions are encrypted (Asian Development Bank, 2023; Camoens, 2025; Europol, 2025).

To combat this effectively, we must move beyond stereotypes and examine the specific roles within each network (Europol, 2025; UNODC, 2025). Some individuals recruit victims. Others manage transport, handle finances, or enforce compliance. Each role supports the others, forming a resilient structure that survives even when one part is disrupted. Targeting a single actor rarely dismantles the whole system. Success requires coordinated action across agencies, sectors, and communities. In other words, using intelligence rather than reaction.

As global economic pressures grow and migration patterns shift, trafficking networks are evolving. New hybrid models are emerging that combine trafficking with other illegal activities such as drug smuggling or online fraud (Europol, 2025; UNODC, 2025). The future of prevention lies in adaptive systems that can predict behavioural changes before they escalate. Training must now include financial trail analysis, digital forensics, and cross-border intelligence sharing as core skills.

Organisations must prepare for this changing landscape by building flexible, data-driven responses. This means investing in continuous learning, strengthening interagency cooperation, and empowering frontline staff with the tools to identify emerging threats. The goal is not just to respond to crimes already committed but to anticipate them before they occur. Only by being proactive, rather than reactive; can we break the cycle of exploitation and protect those most at risk.

5.4 Profiling Suspects and Criminals

Illicit networks in human trafficking operate with structured hierarchies, often concealing their activities behind legitimate business fronts (Zulkifli, et. al., 2024; UNODC, 2025). These systems depend on trust built through social ties and economic desperation, embedding operatives deep within vulnerable communities (Sanchez, 2017). Over time, operations have evolved from isolated individuals to coordinated cells, each assigned specific roles in transportation, coercion, and financial concealment. This complexity demands that analysts move beyond examining individual actions to uncover the systemic relationships that sustain the entire criminal architecture.

Effective response requires a shift from reactive observation to predictive analysis. Patterns in movement, communication, and financial flow are no longer random occurrences but reliable indicators of underlying activity. Recent investigations reveal that syndicates consistently reuse recruitment routes across regions, adjusting tactics to local conditions while maintaining core operational methods. The use of encrypted platforms, cash transactions, and third-party intermediaries create layers of obscurity that frustrate traditional detection efforts (Lelliott, & Miller, 2023; Moore, 2024; Pahlevi, 2024). Recognising these recurring structures allows for the identification of targeted intervention points before large scale mobilisation takes place.

These methods follow predictable sequences grounded in organisational theory and resource dependency. According to researchers (Hoffstaedter & Missbach, 2021; Nasir, 2022; Liu, 2024; Malaysian Human Rights Commission, 2024) offenders typically begin with low-risk entry points such as false job offers or romantic deception to establish control before escalating to physical confinement or debt bondage. Their success relies on isolating victims from external support and cultivating learned helplessness through psychological manipulation (Liu, 2024; Ionaşcu & Lup, 2025). The absence of overt violence does not imply benign intent; rather, it reflects a deliberate strategy to avoid triggering official scrutiny while maximising compliance.

EXERCISE: Criminal Profiling Trafficker

Here are three narrative case stories based on the trafficking perpetrator profiles for MCPF criminal profiling exercises. Each story is designed to support trauma-informed analysis, behavioural observation, and simulation-based training. They're structured to reveal patterns over time, with embedded cues for bias awareness and contextual red flags.

Select ONE narrative. Discuss in your group and later provide detailed insights into demographics, personality traits, family dynamics, and social circles of the perpetrator.

👤 Demographics	
🧠 Personality Traits	
🏠 Family Dynamics	
👫 Social Circles	
🧩 Behavioral Cues for Profiling	

Story 1: Somchai—"The Charmer Behind the Job Offer"
Title: *The Opportunity Broker*
Somchai was a familiar face in Bangkok's youth cafes and online job forums. At 34, he styled himself as a freelance "career connector," offering people—mostly young Thai, Cambodian and Vietnamese women—jobs in Malaysia's hospitality sector. His charm was magnetic and used this to build trust quickly. He spoke fluent Thai and Malay, dressed well, and carried himself like a man with international reach.

He recruited through Facebook and Telegram, promising RM2,000/ month jobs in boutique hotels and salons using informal recruiter networks in Malaysia. Somchai claims he helps people by giving them opportunities through shortcuts. Victims were told they'd receive training, accommodation, and legal work permits. What they got instead was confinement, withheld wages, and threats of deportation.

Somchai never handled the exploitation directly. He passed victims to "site managers" in Johor Bahru and Penang, keeping his hands clean. After connecting 'clients' to their 'employers' he removes himself from any interaction. He changes SIM cards weekly, used fake names on travel bookings, and kept his social media curated with motivational quotes and photos of luxury hotels.

His family believed he was a successful entrepreneur. His five other siblings admired his independence, unaware that his "mentorship" was a front for trafficking. Somchai's siblings envied his lifestyle and being away from their strict father and tired mother. He avoided close relationships, preferring transactional interactions. His emotional detachment allowed him to rationalize the abuse experienced by clients as "tough love" and "business discipline."

Story 2: Siti Noraini — "The Matriarch of Domestic Control"
Title: *The House of Discipline*

Siti Noraini binti Mahmud ran a cleaning service empire from her home in Shah Alam. At 52, she was known as a "disciplinarian with a heart"—a widow who built her business from scratch. Her two adult children helped manage operations, and her workers—mostly Indonesian and Filipino women—were housed in dormitories behind her bungalow.
Siti's family supports what she does as they all benefit.

She recruited through religious networks and community centers, offering "safe work" and "family-style supervision." But once inside, workers were stripped of their passports, subjected to 16-hour shifts, and fined for minor infractions (for example, smaller food portions or no food, extra work hours, salary deduction). Siti kept handwritten logs of their movements, monitored them via CCTV, and used religious rhetoric to enforce obedience.

She justified her control as "training for resilience." Ill-health was never an acceptable reason to not work. Siti never hit her workers but she oftens belittle and looks down on them. Workers have run away before, but she always have others willing to replace them. Victims who resisted were isolated or sent back with debt notices. Supervisors—often former victims—were used to enforce rules, creating a hierarchy of fear.

Her social circle included local politicians, religious leaders, and enforcement officers. She donated to community events and was praised for "giving jobs to the needy." Her public image masked a system of coercion, debt bondage, and psychological manipulation.

Story 3: Tonia – "The Saviour of Benin"
Title: *Improving Lives*

They call me "Madam T," but I was just Tonia from Benin City before I learned how the world really works. I'm 34 now, and I've built something that feeds families—mine and theirs. I recruit young women, yes, but I don't see it as trafficking. I give them a way out. I don't seek out girls under 18 or those older than 25. Most of these young women come from nothing: broken homes, no jobs, no future.
I spot them in salons, churches, even WhatsApp groups. I tell them they'll model, work in boutiques, maybe marry rich. Some cry when they arrive in Malaysia on transit, but that's just fear talking. Once they settle their debt, they'll thank me.

I grew up watching my mother beg for food and my father disappear for weeks. My aunt ran a bar and taught me early how to survive—how to smile, how to sell, how to stay quiet. I dropped out of school at 16 and followed her to Lagos, then to Dubai. She taught me the trade, and I improved it. Now I send money home every month. My many siblings and cousins think I'm a businesswoman. They don't ask questions, and I don't offer answers. I keep my circle tight: a fixer in Lagos, a safehouse in KL and Germany, and two "cleaners" who handle girls that get difficult. Loyalty matters. So does silence.

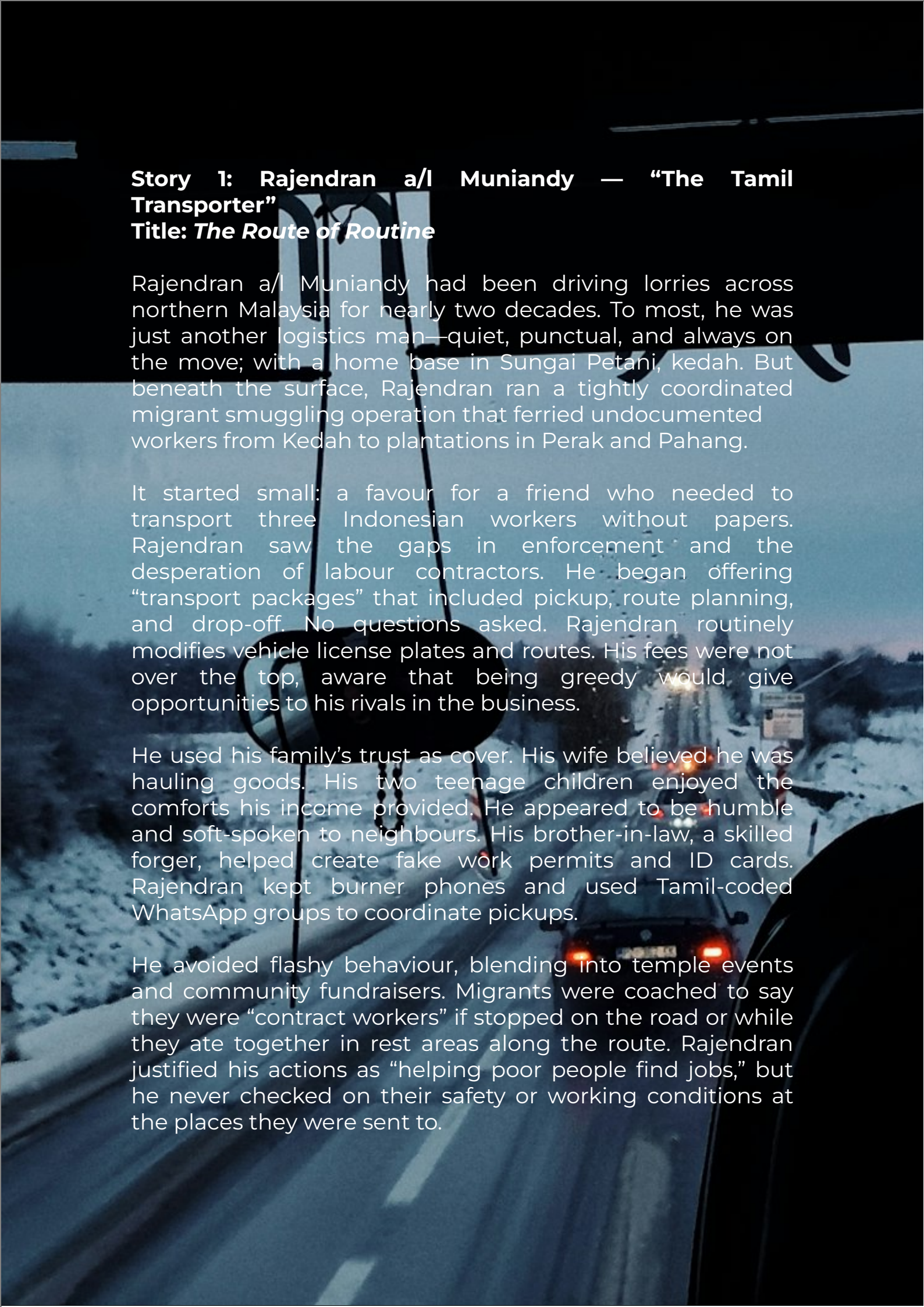
I'm not cruel. I don't beat them. But I do use juju—fear works better than fists. I tell them their spirits are bound until they pay what they owe. I post travel and luxury photos on Instagram to keep the illusion alive. I'm careful with immigration, always changing routes and names. I've lost girls before—runaways, police raids—but I replace them quickly. Officers need to understand: I'm not a monster. I'm a product of my environment. If you want to stop people like me, don't just arrest us, disrupt the system that made us necessary.

EXERCISE: Criminal Profiling Smuggler

Here are three narrative case stories based on the smuggler perpetrator profiles for MCPF criminal profiling exercises. Each story is designed to support trauma-informed analysis, behavioural observation, and simulation-based training. They're structured to reveal patterns over time, with embedded cues for bias awareness and contextual red flags.

Select ONE narrative. Discuss in your group and later provide detailed insights into demographics, personality traits, family dynamics, and social circles of the perpetrator.

👤 Demographics	
🧠 Personality Traits	
🏠 Family Dynamics	
👫 Social Circles	
🧩 Behavioral Cues for Profiling	



Story 1: Rajendran a/l Muniandy — "The Tamil Transporter"
Title: *The Route of Routine*

Rajendran a/l Muniandy had been driving lorries across northern Malaysia for nearly two decades. To most, he was just another logistics man—quiet, punctual, and always on the move; with a home base in Sungai Petani, kedah. But beneath the surface, Rajendran ran a tightly coordinated migrant smuggling operation that ferried undocumented workers from Kedah to plantations in Perak and Pahang.

It started small: a favour for a friend who needed to transport three Indonesian workers without papers. Rajendran saw the gaps in enforcement and the desperation of labour contractors. He began offering "transport packages" that included pickup, route planning, and drop-off. No questions asked. Rajendran routinely modifies vehicle license plates and routes. His fees were not over the top, aware that being greedy would give opportunities to his rivals in the business.

He used his family's trust as cover. His wife believed he was hauling goods. His two teenage children enjoyed the comforts his income provided. He appeared to be humble and soft-spoken to neighbours. His brother-in-law, a skilled forger, helped create fake work permits and ID cards. Rajendran kept burner phones and used Tamil-coded WhatsApp groups to coordinate pickups.

He avoided flashy behaviour, blending into temple events and community fundraisers. Migrants were coached to say they were "contract workers" if stopped on the road or while they ate together in rest areas along the route. Rajendran justified his actions as "helping poor people find jobs," but he never checked on their safety or working conditions at the places they were sent to.

Story 2: Lim Wei Seng "The Sino-Thai Broker"
Title: *The Spreadsheet Smuggler*

36 year old Lim Wei Seng operated like a corporate strategist. Based in Bukit Kayu Hitam, he coordinated the movement of undocumented migrants from Thailand, Myanmar, and the Philippines into Malaysia with precision. Fluent in Thai, Burmese, and Hokkien, Lim built a network of van drivers, hotel owners, and document forgers across the border.

He never met most of the migrants. His role was planning: routes, timing, payment schedules. He kept coded spreadsheets with migrant profiles—age, origin, destination, risk level. He used karaoke lounges and massage parlours as meeting points, avoiding religious or community spaces.

Lim's elderly parents believed he worked in import-export and is proud of his many international business trips. His cousin in Hat Yai helped arrange border crossings. He maintained multiple short-term relationships in a few countries, but avoided emotional ties. Migrants were referred to as "units" or "drops," and he charged extra for "low-risk" delivery.

He used encrypted apps like Signal and Line, changed meeting locations frequently, and paid off enforcement contacts when needed. His charisma made him seem trustworthy, but his detachment was chilling. He never asked what happened to the migrants after delivery.

Story 3: Uncle Rizal –"The Smooth Sailor"
Title: *Riding the High Seas*

They call me "Uncle Rizal," but I'm just Rizal bin Hamzah from Klang. I'm 41, and I've been moving people from Malaysia to Australia for over a decade. I don't see myself as a criminal—I'm a connector. I help desperate people find new lives. Most of my clients are Malaysians, Rohingya, Bangladeshis, and West Africans who've overstayed or arrived undocumented.

I arrange their passage through Indonesia, then onto boats bound for Darwin or Broome. Sometimes I man the boat myself. I know the routes, the tides, and which patrols can be paid off. I keep things quiet—no flashy cars, no social media. Just burner phones, coded messages, and trusted middlemen.

I grew up in a cramped two-bedroom flat in Klang with four siblings and a father who worked the docks. He taught me how to read shipping schedules and who to trust. My mother sold nasi lemak outside the port gates—she still does. I dropped out of school at 15 and started running errands for boat crews. By 25, I was coordinating movements myself. My family doesn't ask questions.

They know I send money, pay for my siblings' and niece's schools, and keep food on the table. My younger brother helps with logistics, and my cousin in Medan handles the Indonesian leg. We're not a syndicate—we're a survival system.

I don't threaten people. I offer options. I find clients through mosque networks, construction sites, and WhatsApp groups. No one is forced to take the deal. I tell them Australia is the land of dignity, where no one asks about your past.

I coach them on what to say if caught, how to claim asylum, and how to blend in. I use religious language to build trust, and I never promise safety—only possibility. I've had no shows, lost boats. I've seen fear. But I remind them: staying here means nothing changes. Officers need to understand—people like me aren't just smugglers. We're products of broken migration systems, and until those change, we'll keep moving people forward.

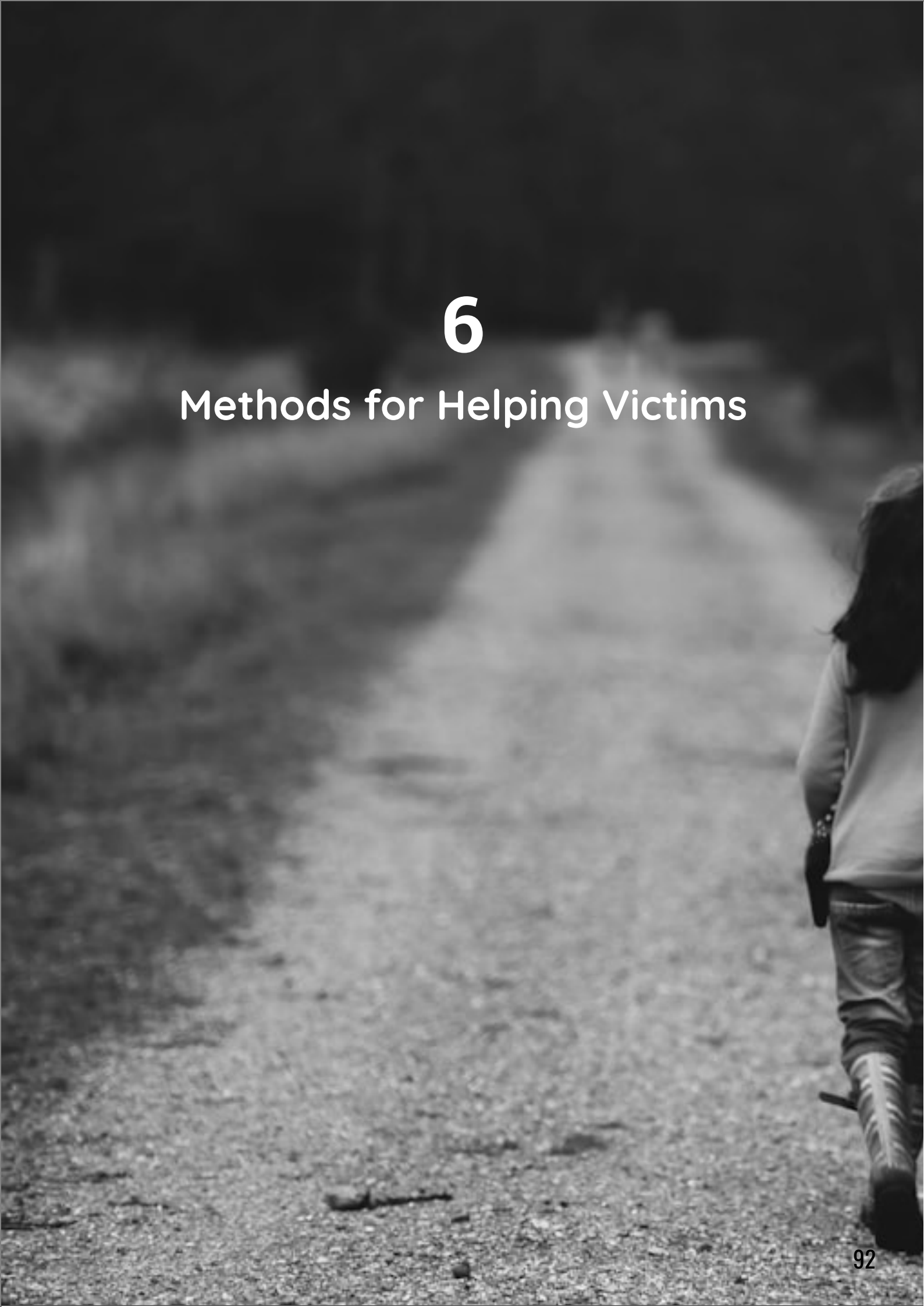
5.5 Solving the Puzzle

This field requires interdisciplinary insight, combining criminological frameworks with behavioural economics and network theory to decode hidden connections. Analysts must learn to trace indirect links between seemingly unrelated incidents (a missing person report in one area, a suspicious payroll record in another) to reveal relationships. Training in pattern recognition enables practitioners to spot anomalies that standard procedures overlook. When multiple data streams converge even minor inconsistencies can signal the presence of an active cell operating beneath public awareness.

Those working in this space must cultivate patience and precision, resisting the urge to reduce complex realities into simplified profiles. The most effective responses arise not from isolated arrests but from sustained intelligence gathering that maps the full scope of influence. Collaboration between border agencies, financial regulators, and community liaisons creates overlapping surveillance layers that limit opportunities for evasion. Success is measured not by the number of cases closed but by the disruption of recurring mechanisms that allow exploitation to persist across jurisdictions.

Digitisation of recruitment and payment systems introduces new vulnerabilities that can be turned into investigative advantages. Digital footprints, even when obscured; leave traces in metadata, device identifiers, and transaction timing (Theologi, 2025) When correlated, these elements form a reliable signature of activity. Emerging tools for behavioural analytics offer unprecedented capacity to detect coordination among dispersed actors without direct surveillance (Pahlevi, 2024; Rossoni, Büyükkalkan & Erken, 2024). As these technologies mature, the ability to anticipate and neutralise threats will grow—but only if practitioners remain vigilant against overreliance on automation at the expense of human insight.

NOTES:



6
Methods for Helping Victims

6

Methods for Helping Victims

6.1 Practical Tools for Recognition

Identifying individuals trapped in exploitative systems demands more than instinct. It requires disciplined observation, structured inquiry, and a steadfast commitment to ethical engagement. In Malaysia's complex social environment, where migration patterns meet economic pressures and cultural subtleties, detecting quiet signs of distress becomes a critical skill for those on the front lines. These signs often hide beneath silence, compliance, or fear, turning detection into a challenge that calls for methods rooted in evidence and compassion.

These approaches are shaped by global best practices refined through years of field experience and forensic analysis. As described in Chapters 4 and 5, professionals rely on layered indicators that include behavioral patterns, inconsistencies in personal stories, and environmental cues; to build a clear picture of a person's reality. Someone who avoids eye contact, gives rehearsed answers, or shows physical signs of restraint may be revealing just one part of a larger truth. These signs rarely appear alone; their combination forms the basis of reliable assessment.

Cultural context further complicates interpretation. How distress is expressed varies widely across communities. What looks like submission in one setting may reflect deep respect or trauma induced withdrawal in another. Skilled practitioners learn to read nonverbal signals through culturally informed perspectives, avoiding assumptions based on unfamiliar norms. Trauma informed engagement places safety, patience, and autonomy at its core, ensuring interactions do not reinforce power imbalances or cause additional harm.

The tools used in these situations are not rigid checklists but flexible frameworks designed to support judgment under uncertainty. Interview protocols guide questioning without pressure, allowing narratives to emerge naturally. Documentation systems help track contradictions between what is said and what is observed, creating a record that supports further action while protecting confidentiality. Environmental assessments consider location, supervision, mobility, and access to resources as key factors that either enable or restrict freedom.

When MCPF members encounter a suspected case of human trafficking or migrant smuggling, their first priority should be to ensure safety and minimize harm. This is for both for the potential victim and themselves. They should observe and document behavioral cues such as fear, scripted responses, or signs of control, while avoiding assumptions about guilt or consent.

Engaging with trauma-informed sensitivity, members should discreetly separate individuals for private questioning, use culturally appropriate language, and avoid confrontational tactics. It's critical to activate referral protocols: notify designated protection officers, involve trusted NGOs, and ensure access to interpreters or psychosocial support if needed. Profiling should focus on patterns—not just individuals—by mapping relationships, travel histories, and control mechanisms. Above all, MCPF members must treat each case as a potential gateway to disrupting wider networks, not just isolating one perpetrator or victim.

It is cautioned here that these methods are not replacements for formal investigation but preliminary filters that sharpen awareness and reduce misinterpretation. Their power lies in turning vague unease into actionable insight, empowering frontline staff to act with confidence rather than doubt. When paired with institutional protocols and interagency coordination, they become force multipliers in identifying at risk individuals before harm deepens.

Applying these techniques well requires continuous refinement, cultural sensitivity, and humility in the face of complexity. The next section will show how recognition leads to action—how awareness transforms into intervention, and how ethical choices shape the path to care. What follows is not merely procedural but deeply human: the moment when understanding becomes responsibility.

As participants engage with real world scenarios in upcoming exercises, they will confront the unpredictability of human behavior under stress. The challenge is not only to spot signs but to respond with precision, compassion, and legal awareness. This field honors those who listen beyond words, observe beyond appearances, and act with both courage and care.

6.2 Initial Action Response Training

When encountering individuals caught in human trafficking, the priority is not simply to act but to act with care, precision, and deep respect for their humanity. The first moments after detection shape the entire course of safety and justice. Responders must evaluate the environment before any approach, ensuring their presence does not heighten danger or prompt concealment. This demands a calm presence, open body language, and awareness of spatial cues that can either reassure or alarm those in distress. The aim is to build trust without making promises that cannot be fulfilled.

These situations require a structured yet adaptable framework for intervention. Participants must learn to notice subtle signs—avoiding eye contact, flinching at sudden sounds, contradictory stories, or physical signs of prolonged stress, not as proof but as indicators warranting deeper inquiry. These signals, drawn from documented patterns in real cases, form the basis of a response method rooted in observation not assumption. The focus is on gathering information without pressure, allowing the person to share their experience in their own time while maintaining a secure and stable setting.

First Aid and Medical Attention

When a victim of human trafficking or migrant smuggling comes to your attention, your first step is to ensure their safety and stabilize their condition. According to the UNODC (2011), basic first aid includes checking for injuries, calming the victim, and protecting them from further harm. Avoid asking too many questions at first. Focus on making them feel safe. If they are injured or in shock, call for medical help immediately and stay with them until professionals arrive.

Malaysia's Home Ministry emphasises the importance of trauma-informed care (Malay Mail, Jan 30, 2023). This means treating victims gently, respecting their boundaries, avoiding sudden movements, and avoiding actions that might remind them of past abuse. Many victims may be dehydrated, malnourished, or suffering from untreated illnesses. Offer clean water, food, and a quiet space. If the victim is a child or shows signs of psychological distress, prioritise getting them to a hospital or shelter with trained counsellors.

Once the victim is stable, refer them to trusted support services. NGOs like Tenaganita and government shelters offer medical, psychological, and legal help. Always document what you observed and did, but keep the victim's identity confidential. According to the 2025 U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report, Malaysia has increased efforts to support victims, including better shelter access and more trauma-informed services. .

Remember: you may be the victim's only chance to escape a dangerous situation. SUHAKAM (2025) advises that all frontline responders act quickly and compassionately, ensuring the victim's rights are protected from the moment they are rescued. Your actions can make a life-saving difference. Below is a general list of organisations that can be contacted in relation to helping victims of TIPSOM.

Organisation	Service	Contact Info
Royal Malaysia Police	General emergency and rescue	Helpline: 999
Council for Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants (MAPO)	Coordinator for the implementation of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act (ATIPSOM) 2007	General line: 03-8880 8854
Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)	Victim rights and referral support	General line: 03-2612 5600 Email: humanrights@suhakam.org.my Website: https//suhakam.org.my/
Tenaganita	Rescue, shelter, legal aid	Helpline: 012 335 0512 Email: general@tenaganita.net Website: http://tenaganita.net
AWAM	Helps victims and survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and people in crisis, Free counselling services and legal information	Helpline: 016-237 4221 Email: telenita@awam.org.my Website: https://www.awam.org.my/
Be My Protector App	Mobile reporting tool for trafficking cases	Available on Android & IOS
Women Centre for Change (WCC) Penang	Free and confidential services for women & children that are experiencing domestic violence, marital or relationship problems, rape and sexual harassment.	Helpline: 04-2280342 – Penang island Helpline: 04-3988340 – Seberang Perai Email: wcc@wccpenang.org Website: https://www.wccpenang.org/
Protect and Save the Children (P.S. The Children)	Case intervention and support to survivors and families affected by child abuse, especially sexual abuse	Helpline: 016-7213065 SMS / WhatsApp: 016 721 3065 Email: protect@psthechildren.org.my Website: https://www.psthechildren.org.my/
Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)	24hrs rescue, shelter, social work, counselling	Helpline: 03 7956 3488 SMS / WhatsApp: 018 988 8058 Email: info@wao.org.my Website: https://wao.org.my/
Befrienders Kuala Lumpur	Free 24X7 helpline for information and trauma support	Helpline: 603-76272929 Email: sam@befrienders.org.my Website: https://www.befrienders.org.my/

Field Situation Response & Initial Actions

This refers to the immediate actions and decisions taken by frontline responders—like MCPF members—when they encounter a potentially dangerous, sensitive, or urgent situation in the field. In the context of human trafficking or migrant smuggling, it means responding quickly, safely, and ethically to protect victims, gather evidence, and coordinate with support services. The exercise below depicts what is typically involved.

EXERCISE: Responding in the Field

Instruction: View the video via the link provide. After viewing, write down your responses in the form below.

Disclaimer: These videos are for educational purposes only.

Video 1: http//www.youtube.com/watch?v=3up27TFIIXU

Video 2: http//www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zeFlhfoxO8

Video 3: http:////www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtVHnZX8E50

Video case number: _____

Situational Response
1. Safety First Notes:
2. Observing and Identifying Notes:
3. Gentle Engagement Notes:
4. Stabilizing the Victim Notes:
5. Documentation and Referral Notes:
6. Refer to Support Services and Maintain Confidentiality Notes:

The procedures guiding this engagement are not theoretical suggestions, but practical routines refined through real field experience and institutional review. Each step must align with legal standards and ethical boundaries. Documentation is not a bureaucratic formality but a vital tool for preserving truth and enabling future support systems to function effectively. Accurate, neutral notes become the link between immediate aid and long-term protection.

This reality highlights the need for training that goes beyond technical skill. It builds moral clarity under pressure, where the impulse to act quickly must be balanced with the duty to honour autonomy. First responders are not saviours but facilitators, enablers of choice rather than decision makers. Their role is to create space for agency, offer pathways without force, and connect without overriding personal control. Research shows this approach increases cooperation and reduces further trauma.

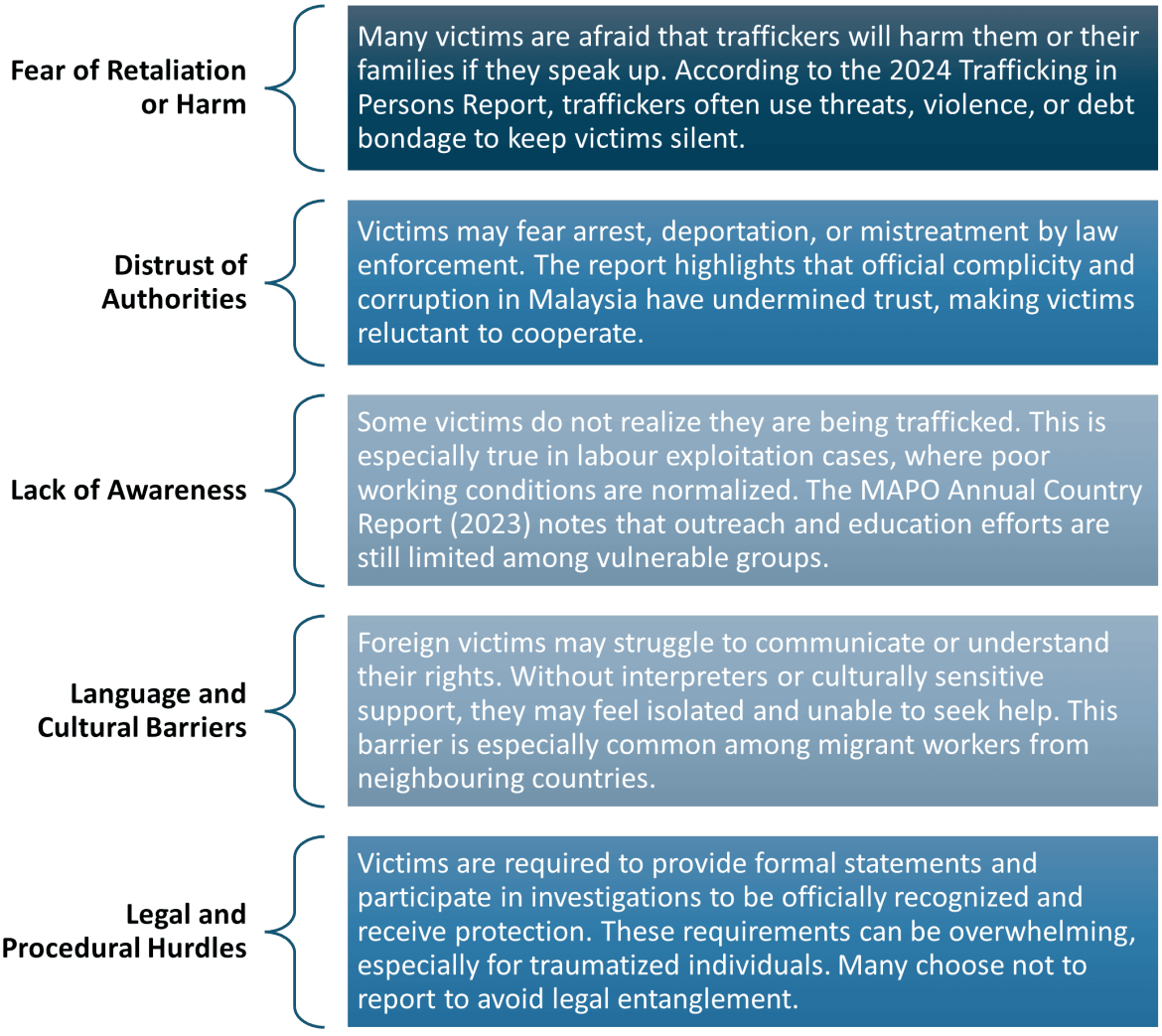
These practices are not uniformly applied across all regions, yet core principles remain constant: safety first, dignity always, transparency as standard. The most effective responders operate with humility, recognising the limits of their authority and the depth of the trauma they witness. They understand their actions echo beyond the moment, influencing whether a person will seek help again or withdraw into silence. Training must include reflection on emotional impact, peer debriefing, and access to psychological support for those regularly exposed to these conditions.

Moving forward, progress in trauma-informed approaches and victim support, depends on integrating frontline insights into systemic improvements. What works on the ground must inform policy, and what policy requires must adapt to real world complexity. Organisations must ensure these standards are applied consistently across diverse settings. The next section examines the ethical frameworks that govern reporting obligations and institutional accountability, where clear procedure meets profound moral responsibility.

6.3 Ethical Reporting Protocols

Every step in handling suspected trafficking or smuggling cases must be guided by principles that protect dignity and uphold justice. Recognition is only the beginning; true responsibility lies in disciplined documentation, unwavering privacy, and coordinated action with institutional supports. Missteps can deepen harm, break trust, and derail legal proceedings. Each interaction is a fragile link in a larger system of protection, where care and caution must always go hand in hand.

Structured routines are essential to preserve autonomy while ensuring accountability. Information must be recorded with precision, free from assumption or emotional interpretation, and stored securely, accessible only to authorized personnel. Communication between agencies must follow defined channels to prevent leaks, misdirection, or unintended exposure. Even small disclosures can lead to retaliation or retraumatisation, making discretion not just wise but necessary.



Many individuals resist reporting due to fear of deportation, stigma, or harm to family members. Others may not know their rights or have lost trust in authorities because of past experiences. These realities call for patient, noncoercive engagement—offering reassurance without pressure, clarity without urgency. The goal is not to extract testimony but to create conditions where truth can emerge naturally, once safety is assured and personal agency is restored.

These dynamics require alignment with established protocols that override individual judgment. Coordination with specialized units, legal advocates, and social services must be prearranged and practiced, not improvised in moments of crisis. Protocols should include clear escalation paths, standardized forms for data collection, and mechanisms for ongoing review. Training must reinforce that reporting is not an endpoint but a gateway to sustained support, requiring continuity long after the first contact.

Systemic gaps remain despite existing legal frameworks. Delays in interagency response, uneven training across regions, and underfunded shelters weaken even the best intentions. These are not abstract problems—they result in missed interventions and prolonged suffering. Addressing them demands institutional commitment, not just individual vigilance. Continuous evaluation of outcomes, feedback from survivors, and adaptation based on emerging evidence must become standard practice.

The future lies in embedding ethical standards into daily operations, so they become instinctive rather than exceptional. Technology can enhance transparency through encrypted reporting tools and digital case tracking, but only when paired with human centered design and cultural competence. True progress comes from building networks where every actor—from frontline staff to policymakers—understands their role as part of a unified shield against exploitation.

7
Community Engagement Strategies

7
Community Engagement Strategies

7.1 Importance of Community Involvement

When official systems struggle to reach every corner of society, the quiet strength of local networks often becomes the most dependable shield against exploitation. Trust built through daily interaction, shared space and history, and mutual responsibility can uncover signs of harm long before formal channels notice them. This is why community involvement is not an auxiliary effort but a vital foundation in breaking the cycles of coercion and deception.

Effective prevention demands more than passive watching. It requires active involvement grounded in cultural understanding and genuine relationships. This has been a hallmark of Malaysian multi-ethnic communities. Unfortunately, contemporary lifestyles have begun to slowly erode this.

Communities that encourage open conversation and consistent connection create spaces where vulnerability cannot easily hide. When people feel seen and supported by those around them, they are less likely to fall prey to manipulation. Those who seek to exploit find their opportunities diminished by collective awareness and shared vigilance.

This kind of protection thrives on the subtle power of everyday life. Ordinary moments, for example chatting at the market, dropping children off at school, sharing meals; become opportunities to notice changes. Training residents to recognize behavioural shifts, unexplained disappearances, presence of strangers, or signs of distress turns routine social life into a distributed early warning system. These practices do not replace official procedures. They extend their reach into areas where institutional presence is limited or slow to arrive.

Here are five simple reasons why community involvement is important in stopping trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants (TIPSOM):

1. **People learn the truth**
   - When communities talk about TIPSOM, they can break myths and share real facts.
   - This helps people spot danger and avoid being tricked.

2. **More eyes watching**
   - Community members can notice strange behavior or people in trouble.
   - They can report it early before things get worse.

3. **Support for victims**
   - Survivors feel safer when their community understands and helps them.
   - Local support makes healing and justice easier.

4. **Stronger voices together**
   - Communities can speak up to demand better laws and protection.
   - When many people care, leaders listen.

5. **Safer spaces for everyone**
   - Involved communities create safer schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.
   - Prevention becomes part of everyday life.

7.2 Successful Campaigns Against Trafficking & Smuggling

Success depends on respecting local customs, languages, and traditions. Top-down approaches often fail without alignment to community values. When those who live within these environments lead the response, interventions gain legitimacy and adaptability. The outcome is not only better detection but also reduced stigma, allowing those affected to seek help without fear of shame or isolation.

History shows that the most lasting protections against hidden abuses arise not from laws alone but from communities that refuse to turn away. Whether through religious groups, youth organizations, or women's collectives, these informal networks have repeatedly shown the ability to act swiftly, respond with sensitivity, and sustain effort over years. Their power lies in consistency, not spectacle. In presence, not protocol.

The influence of local communities can go beyond immediate rescue. When communities embrace safety as a shared duty, they nurture a culture of care that deters exploitation before it starts. Meaningful change does not always require large budgets or complex systems. It often begins with a single conversation, a raised hand, or the simple courage to ask the right question. This shift in mindset, where protection is seen as a collective responsibility rather than a government obligation. Subsequently, this creates lasting resilience that benefits future generations.

Efforts to combat human trafficking in Malaysia have shown that sustained public engagement, when rooted in accurate information and genuine community trust, can reshape attitudes and break down indifference. This is the core of what MCPF has been doing since its inception in 1993. Civil society groups, working alongside local authorities, have used targeted messaging through media broadcasts, school visits, and mobile information units to reach populations most at risk. These initiatives avoided fear-based appeals and instead focused on empowerment, clear explanations of rights, and simple ways to report concerns.

This progress was not the result of isolated efforts but of coordinated networks involving religious leaders, academicians, and market vendors. These are individuals who naturally interact with vulnerable communities. Training such local figures to spot subtle signs of distress, without requiring formal expertise, creates a distributed early warning system. Success comes from weaving awareness into everyday life rather than treating it as a temporary campaign. This approach reduces stigma and makes conversations about exploitation feel normal and safe.

Impacts for change can be deepened by survivor stories, carefully shared to avoid retraumatization while preserving truth. Public forums featuring those who escaped forced labour led by trained facilitators with psychological safeguards is one example. These experience sharing events do not ask for pity but invite understanding of systemic failures and personal strength. Together, these efforts shifted public discourse from passive observation to active civic duty.

Roles that Citizens should Partake

Role	Description
1. **Reporting Crime & Suspicious Activity**	Promptly sharing accurate information with police helps prevent escalation.
2. **Participating in Neighbourhood Watch**	Collaborating with neighbours and police to monitor and deter local crime.
3. **Attending Community Safety Meetings**	Engaging in dialogue with enforcement to voice concerns and co-develop solutions.
4. **Volunteering for Police Initiatives**	Supporting events, patrols, or clerical tasks to strengthen community ties.
5. **Educating Others on Crime Prevention**	Promoting safety tips and awareness in schools, workplaces, and online spaces.
6. **Serving on Advisory Boards**	Advising law enforcement on community needs, trust-building, and policy reform.
7. **Supporting Youth Engagement Programmes**	Encouraging participation in cadet programs, mentorships, and civic education.
8. **Promoting Positive Perceptions of Law Enforcement**	Sharing constructive stories and fostering mutual respect between citizens and police.

Community involvement underscores a broader principle: prevention thrives when authority is shared rather than concentrated. The goal is not only to find victims after harm occurs but to build environments where exploitation cannot take hold. Moving forward, the focus must turn to embedding these practices into formal education and municipal planning. The next step is to integrate recognition protocols into routine services in health clinics, transport hubs, and employment offices so that vigilance becomes second nature.

7.3 Building Local Partnerships

Effective intervention depends on bringing together institutions and groups that operate beyond traditional law enforcement. When civil society, faith-based networks, schools, and community groups work alongside official agencies, they form a layered defence against exploitation. This collaboration is built through shared goals, mutual responsibility, and structured dialogue that breaks down institutional barriers. Success relies on trust earned over time, not just on the exchange of resources or information.

Clear roles and open communication are essential. Misaligned objectives or unspoken expectations create friction, weaken operations, and damage public confidence. Regular coordination meetings, where participants engage not as representatives of competing organisations but as partners in a unified effort, help resolve tensions before they grow. These gatherings must follow agreed rules on data handling, confidentiality, and decision making. No single group should dominate; all must have meaningful influence.

Resource sharing goes beyond money or staff. It includes knowledge, access, and influence. Religious leaders who are trusted in their communities can spread awareness more effectively than printed flyers. Teachers who notice changes in student behaviour can act as early warning systems. Health workers in remote clinics may be the first to spot signs of coercion hidden as illness. When these individuals are part of a broader response system, their unique insights turn isolated observations into actionable intelligence.

This approach requires ongoing investment in capacity building, not one-time training sessions but continuous learning pathways. Training must help partners recognise their own biases, understand the psychological consequences on survivors, and navigate cultural differences without imposing outside frameworks. Equally important are feedback loops that let frontline voices shape policy. This ensures interventions stay rooted in real experience rather than abstract theory.

No single effort, no matter how well meant, can solve this problem alone. History shows that fragmented responses offer only temporary relief and often shift harm rather than remove it. True resilience comes when diverse actors develop interdependent routines where reporting systems are shared, referrals flow smoothly, and recovery paths are designed together. This structure does not appear overnight. It is forged through repeated cooperation, mutual learning, and the quiet determination of those who value justice over recognition.

The most promising advances lie in digital tools that enable secure, real-time coordination without centralising control. Mobile apps used by volunteers to report concerns anonymously, encrypted channels between clinics and social services, and open-source maps that show risk areas—all these innovations reduce barriers to participation while protecting privacy. Their use must be paired with ethical safeguards and training to prevent misuse. Technology should support human judgment, not replace it.

As MCPF members grow in their roles, their greatest power will come not from authority alone but from the networks they build. The strength of any prevention system lies in its connections—between neighbourhoods and institutions, between silence and voice, between fear and empowerment. The next step demands that MCPF members become architects of collaboration, not just responders to crisis.

8

Preventive Strategies and Measures

8

Preventive Strategies and Measures

8.1 Overview of Crime Prevention

In Criminology, there are generally two types of crime prevention: proactive and reactive (Rivera, Morales, & Torres, 2024; den Heyer, 2025). Proactive crime prevention focuses on stopping crime before it happens. This type of crime prevention involves planning, education, and community engagement to reduce risks and remove opportunities for criminal behaviour (Maidin, et. al., 2024). The goal is to hinder crime so it can't happen, involving early planning and risk assessment.

Examples include installing streetlights in dark areas, running awareness campaigns, and training frontline workers to spot early warning signs. This approach is often used in schools, neighbourhoods, and public spaces to build safer environments and promote responsible behaviour.

Reactive crime prevention takes place after a crime has already occurred. It includes actions like investigating the crime, arresting suspects, and helping victims recover. The goal is to catch the perpetrator and stop more harm from happening. Unfortunately, this involves waiting for crime to occur before taking action.

Police reports, forensic analysis, and court trials are all part of this response. While reactive measures are important for justice and accountability, they don’t stop the crime from happening in the first place (den Heyer, 2025).

Both approaches are necessary and work best when combined. Proactive strategies reduce the chances of crime, while reactive responses ensure that justice is served and lessons are learned (Apene, Blamah, & Aimufua, 2024; Rivera, Morales, & Torres, 2024). In Malaysia, for example, proactive community involvement in anti-trafficking education can prevent exploitation, while reactive support services help survivors rebuild their lives. Balancing both helps create a safer and more informed society.

Combating forced exploitation and unauthorized movement requires more than reactive enforcement. It demands proactive systems built on awareness, structural oversight, and credible deterrence. These conditions do not arise in isolation but emerge from deeper societal gaps where economic instability and limited access to legitimate opportunity. Recognising this reality is moving toward meaningful intervention, shifting focus from punishment alone to prevention through systemic change.

Global institutions have validated education as a foundational layer of resistance. Targeted programmes that inform at-risk communities about deceptive recruitment tactics reduce vulnerability by empowering individuals with knowledge rather than fear. When people understand how false promises are constructed and how legal pathways can be accessed, the appeal of dangerous alternatives diminishes significantly. These efforts achieve their greatest impact when delivered through trusted local networks, ensuring cultural relevance and sustained engagement over time.

Monitoring high risk environments, such as informal labour sectors, transit hubs, and unregulated recruitment agencies; is another critical dimension of this work. Surveillance must be intelligent, not intrusive, guided by data on patterns of movement and employment anomalies rather than broad suspicion.

8.2 Summary of Popular Crime Prevention Theories

There are many theories that attempt to provide ways to prevent crime. Among the more popular theories used in research are Routine Activity Theory (RAT), Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), Social Disorganisation Theory (SDT), and Situational Crime Prevention (SCP). Below is a summary of each of these theories and their potential in combatting TIPSOM.

Routine Activity Theory

RAT posits that crime occurs when a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian converge in time and space (Thomas, Jeong, & Wolff, 2025). Leukfeldt and Yar (2016) applied RAT to cybercrime, analysing over 9,000 cases. They found that visibility and accessibility of targets online significantly influenced victimization, while traditional guardianship mechanisms were less effective in digital environments (Leukfeldt & Yar, 2016). This suggests the need to adapt RAT for modern, technology-driven crimes.

More recently, Thomas, Jeong, and Wolff (2025) conducted a mediation analysis on daily records of crime between 2015 and 2019. Their study revealed that alterations in routine activities account for a statistically significant, yet modest, proportion of temperature's relationship with homicides, shootings, assaults, larceny and public consumption violations. It is likely that TIPSOM movements hinge on seasonal climate as well.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

The CPTED theoretical model integrates safety with neighbourhood liveability, emphasizing community well-being alongside physical design to deter criminal behaviour. Saville and Mihinjac (2022) argued that crime prevention should not only focus on controlling space but also on fostering social cohesion, inclusion, and long-term sustainability. The current third-generation CPTED encourages multidisciplinary collaboration and community empowerment to create safer urban environments.

Wen, et. al. (2025) conducted a bibliometric analysis of CPTED research trends, highlighting its growing relevance in urban safety planning. They advocate for localized applications of CPTED, especially in multicultural and high-density areas (Wen, et. al., 2025). The researchers also emphasised the importance of integrating social and spatial factors to enhance long-term crime prevention outcomes.

Social Disorganization Theory

This theory links crime rates to neighbourhood characteristics like poverty, residential mobility, and ethnic heterogeneity. Wang, Park, and Lee (2025) explored how environmental disorder in Chicago such as graffiti, abandoned vehicles, and poor lighting; correlated with both misdemeanours and felonies. Their findings

support the theory's claim that disorganized environments foster crime and recommend tailored urban planning strategies to address specific local crime patterns (Wang, Park, & Lee, 2025).

Canh and Minh (2025) explored how community structure and participation in neighbourhood organisations affected crime rates in Vietnam. Using panel data from the Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (2017–2020), the researchers found that strong social ties and active participation in voluntary organizations were linked to lower crime rates (Canh & Minh, 2025). The findings support Social Disorganization Theory, which suggests that economic instability, residential mobility, and weak social networks increase crime.

Situational Crime Prevention

Situational Crime Prevention focuses on reducing opportunities for crime by modifying the physical or social environment. It emphasizes practical strategies like improving lighting, installing CCTV, or redesigning spaces to deter criminal behaviour. According to Eck and Clarke (2020), SCP is effective across various crime types from petty theft to terrorism and does not necessarily displace crime to other areas. Instead, it often reduces crime near prevention sites by targeting specific settings and behaviours.

SCP focuses on reducing opportunities for crime by altering the immediate environment. Quan, Duan, and Fu (2025) introduced a multidimensional situational awareness model to address complex economic crimes, especially in digital contexts. Their framework emphasizes dynamic monitoring through environmental perception, behaviour prediction, and rapid response, showing that proactive environmental adjustments can significantly reduce cross-border and cyber-enabled crimes.

8.3 Levels of Crime Prevention

Crime prevention for TIPSOM operates across four key levels: primary, secondary, tertiary, and situational prevention. Primary prevention aims to stop TIPSOM before it begins by addressing root causes such as poverty, lack of education, and misinformation. This is often through awareness campaigns, community engagement, and policy reform.

Level	Focus	Target Group	Examples of Strategies
Primary	Prevent crime before it occurs by addressing root causes and risk factors	General population	Public education campaigns Urban design (CPTED) Parenting programs School enrichment
Secondary	Intervene early with at-risk individuals or groups	High-risk individuals or environments	Youth mentoring Truancy interventions Drug prevention programs Community outreach
Tertiary	Prevent reoffending and support rehabilitation	Known offenders and victims	Prison rehabilitation Restorative justice Crisis therapy Reintegration support
Situational	Reduce opportunities for crime through environmental and systemic controls	Specific locations or crime types	CCTV and lighting Access control Target hardening Crime mapping and hotspot policing

Secondary prevention focuses on identifying and protecting at-risk individuals or communities. This level of crime prevention uses early intervention strategies like school programs, border monitoring, and targeted outreach. Tertiary prevention involves responding after a crime has occurred. This level of crime prevention seeks to ensure justice for victims, providing trauma-informed support services, and preventing re-victimization or reoffending.

Shown in the next page, situational crime prevention works on five principles that make crime more difficult and reduce vulnerabilities of community members. It involves making neighbourhoods safer using practical means that everyone in a community is involved in. Together, these levels form a comprehensive approach to reducing and ultimately eliminating TIPSOM.

8.4 Effective Prevention Techniques

The regulatory framework governing labor markets plays an decisive role. When wages are fair, contracts are enforceable, and workers have access to grievance mechanisms, the leverage held by exploitative actors weakens considerably. Evidence from multiple nations shows that strengthening labor rights and ensuring compliance through independent audits leads to fewer cases of coercion and deception. These outcomes are not accidental; they result from deliberate policy design that prioritises dignity over cost efficiency in supply chains and service industries.

Practical Situational Crime Prevention Techniques

1. Increase the Effort

- Make it harder for offenders to commit crime.
- Target hardening (e.g., steering locks, tamper-proof packaging)
- Control access to facilities (e.g., entry phones, card access)
- Screen exits (e.g., ticket checks, merchandise tags)
- Deflect offenders (e.g., street closures, separate facilities)
- Control tools/weapons (e.g., smart guns, spray paint restrictions)

2. Increase the Risks

- Raise the likelihood of detection or apprehension.
- Extend guardianship (e.g., neighbourhood watch, travel in groups)
- Assist natural surveillance (e.g., lighting, defensible space design)
- Reduce anonymity (e.g., ID badges, uniforms)
- Utilize place managers (e.g., trained staff, CCTV)
- Strengthen formal surveillance (e.g., alarms, security patrols)

3. Reduce the Rewards

- Limit the benefits offenders gain from crime.
- Conceal targets (e.g., off-street parking, unmarked trucks)
- Remove targets (e.g., removable car radios, women's shelters)
- Identify property (e.g., property marking, licensing)
- Disrupt markets (e.g., monitor pawn shops, vendor licensing)
- Deny benefits (e.g., ink tags, graffiti removal)

4. Reduce Provocations

- Minimize emotional triggers and conflict situations.
- Reduce frustrations/stress (e.g., efficient queues, soothing environments)
- Avoid disputes (e.g., separate rival groups, fixed fares)
- Reduce emotional arousal (e.g., control violent media, enforce decorum)
- Neutralize peer pressure (e.g., anti-drinking campaigns, school interventions)
- Discourage imitation (e.g., rapid vandalism repair, media censorship)

5. Remove Excuses

- Eliminate justifications for offending behaviour.
- Set rules (e.g., rental agreements, harassment codes)
- Post instructions (e.g., signage, warnings)
- Alert conscience (e.g., speed boards, moral reminders)
- Assist compliance (e.g., easy checkout, public amenities)
- Control drugs and alcohol (e.g., breathalysers, alcohol-free zones)

This reality underscores a broader truth: long term success cannot be achieved through isolated actions. It requires alignment between public policy, private sector conduct, and civil society vigilance. The most resilient interventions are those that anticipate how vulnerability is cultivated, that being through unemployment, displacement, or lack of legal status; and systematically dismantle those conditions before they can be exploited. Such work demands patience, coordination, and a refusal to treat symptoms as causes.

These methods are not theoretical constructs but tested practices refined through years of field experience and evaluation. Their effectiveness lies not in complexity but in consistency by repeating the right actions with precision and commitment across diverse contexts. As MCPF members, your role extends beyond observation; you become part of a network that sustains these principles daily, in workplaces, neighbourhoods, and public spaces.

The central challenge ahead is not designing more programmes but refining how we judge their worth. Future progress depends on embedding evaluation as a routine function, not an afterthought; and integrating it into funding structures, training curricula, and accountability systems. Without this shift, even well intended efforts will remain fragmented and ultimately unsustainable. The path forward requires a new paradigm, one where measurement is inseparable from action, and where every decision is guided by evidence shaped by those most affected.

Meaningful measures go beyond following procedures. It necessitates an alignment between institutional capacity and community trust. The most lasting results come when local people are not just informed but actively involved in shaping solutions that reflect their real experiences. Evidence shows that top-down approaches often fail to sustain engagement, while initiatives led by communities themselves have produced measurable declines in vulnerability over time. True success begins with empowering individuals to adapt responses to their own contexts, rather than applying rigid, one size fits all models.

Language barriers, religious beliefs, and historical distrust can undermine even the best intended efforts if ignored. Professionals who take time to learn local social codes through conversations with elders, consultations with faith leaders, or partnerships with indigenous mediators to achieve higher levels of disclosure and cooperation. Sustainable resilience depends on systems that endure beyond funding cycles and political changes. Sustainability is not created by launching new programmes but by weaving practices into existing structures: schools, clinics, religious groups, and labour oversight.

Common mistakes in TIPSOM crime prevention strategies include overreliance on technology without human judgment or excessive focus on enforcement at the cost of support networks (UNODC, 2025). Surveillance tools may detect patterns but cannot interpret intent or trauma. As a result, systems risk punishing vulnerability instead of protecting it.

Similarly, raids conducted without psychosocial preparation can retraumatize victims and discourage others from speaking up. The most effective responses balance vigilance with compassion, using observation and trust as primary tools before turning to formal procedures. Training must emphasise ethical decision making under pressure, not just technical checklists.

Five common mistakes in crime prevention strategies for TIPSOM

1. Over-reliance on technology
Tools like surveillance systems, databases, and AI profiling can help, but they're not enough. Without human judgment, cultural sensitivity, and survivor input, tech solutions risk missing context or reinforcing bias.

2. Ignoring root causes
Strategies that focus only on catching traffickers often overlook poverty, lack of education, and migration pressures. Without addressing these drivers, prevention remains surface-level.

3. Weak community engagement
Many programs fail to involve local leaders, youth, or survivors. This leads to low trust, poor reporting, and missed opportunities for early intervention.

4. Fragmented coordination
NGOs, police, immigration, and health services often work in silos. Without shared data and joint planning, victims fall through the cracks and traffickers exploit gaps.

5. One-size-fits-all messaging and approaches
Strategies that ignore local culture, language, and context especially in diverse countries like Malaysia can miss key risk factors or fail to engage communities effectively. Messages must be localized for language, culture, and lived realities; especially in multicultural settings like Malaysia.

Therefore, the goal needs to shift from reacting to cases to preventing exploitation before it happens. This means investing in early warning systems rooted in education, economic opportunity, and social inclusion, not only on law enforcement. Communities that offer viable alternatives to risky migration, such as vocational training or access to microfinance, see fewer people fall victim to deceptive recruitment (Europol, 2025; UNODC, 2025). These preventive measures do not require huge budgets but demand political will and coordinated action across ministries. When education, labour, and social welfare agencies align their goals, the entire system becomes a shield against exploitation.

Progress must be measured beyond the number of cases solved. True advancement is seen in reduced fear, improved security, increased trust in institutions, and restored agency among at risk populations. Future efforts must prioritise long term studies that track psychological recovery and social reintegration, not just arrests or rescues. Better crime prevention evolves not through isolated wins but through shared learning where every practitioner contributes insights that improve the whole.

NOTES:

9

Enhancing Social Awareness

9

Enhancing Social Awareness

9.1 Role of Education in Prevention

Combating human trafficking requires more than responding to crimes after they occur. It demands building resilience in young people before they are targeted. When people learn to identify coercion, understand their legal rights, and question misleading offers, they gain the power to protect themselves. This is not abstract theory. Research from global education authorities shows that structured learning programmes integrating these themes can reduce vulnerability among at-risk groups (Varela, et. al., 2020; Zark & Satyen, 2022). Lasting change comes not from onetime events but from consistent inclusion in everyday teaching (Varela, et. al., 2020).

These educational methods have been tested over decades in regions where poverty and displacement make people easy targets. UNESCO's approach places critical thinking, emotional awareness, and civic responsibility at the heart of learning, not as optional topics, but as core elements woven into all subjects. Rather than using fear to drive compliance, these programmes build confidence through knowledge. Students become active defenders of their own safety, not passive recipients of warnings.

In Malaysia modules covering labour rights, digital safety, and migration pathways have already shown clear results. People who receive this training make better decisions and are more likely to report suspicious behavior (Global Shepherds Berhad & NSO-MAPO, 2023; International Justice Mission, 2023). In institutes of learning, academicians and staff note higher engagement and more frequent disclosures of concerning situations from students. These improvements arise not from occasional talks but from repeated exposure across grades and subjects, ensuring the message becomes part of the learning culture.

The reach of this work extends beyond traditional classrooms. Vocational training centers, apprenticeship programmes, and youth clubs also serve as vital spaces for protection. Young people preparing to work abroad benefit greatly from pre departure briefings that explain common recruitment tricks and outline their legal rights. When these sessions use culturally familiar examples and clear language, they significantly reduce the risk of deception. The absence of such preparation remains one of the greatest risks for those seeking work overseas.

The impact of this education spreads outside the classroom. Students who understand exploitation often share what they learn with family members and friends. These informal conversations help normalise discussions about consent, personal boundaries, and fair treatment. Over time, such dialogue weakens the silence that traffickers rely on. Change does not happen quickly, but it grows steadily through repetition, dialogue, and shared understanding.

The next challenge is not creating new programmes but deepening their reach and keeping them current. Digital manipulation, algorithmic targeting, resource demands, and cross border labour schemes necessitates constant updates to content. Future efforts must also examine how media stories and publicised narratives shape public views. Misinformation can undo even the best lessons if left unchallenged, and in many instances have hindered police investigations or led to public unrest. Understanding how narratives influence behavior is essential to protecting progress and ensuring education remains a powerful shield against exploitation.

9.2 Media's Influence on Public Perception

The way the public understands human trafficking is shaped deeply by how stories are chosen, framed, and shared. When coverage relies on dramatic images or oversimplified stereotypes, the true complexity of the issue fades from view. Audiences may come to see human trafficking and smuggling only as a series of rescue missions or shocking crime scenes, missing the deeper systems that allow exploitation to thrive. This distortion weakens public ability to respond with thoughtful action and undermines long term prevention efforts.

Such reporting often prioritizes emotional reaction over factual depth, leading to misunderstandings that hinder victim support. Stories that focus solely on foreign nationals or border crossings reinforce harmful myths while ignoring underlying issues, local cases, and domestic vulnerabilities. The absence of context, such as economic hardship, legal uncertainty, or weak labour oversight; leaves viewers with incomplete and misleading mental models. These gaps are not accidental; they actively shape policy focus and public indifference alike.

Distortion	Reality
1.“Crime is always rising”	Social media often amplifies isolated incidents, creating the false impression that crime rates are constantly increasing. In reality, crime trends fluctuate and require longitudinal data for accurate interpretation. Sensational headlines, viral posts, and algorithmic promotion can distort public perception, leading to unnecessary panic or policy overreaction.
2. “Strangers are the main threat”	Platforms frequently highlight stranger-perpetrated crimes (abductions, assaults in public spaces), overshadowing the fact that most victims, especially of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and trafficking; are harmed by someone they know. This distortion can hinder prevention efforts and misguide victim support strategies.
3. “Victims always look or act a certain way”	Social media narratives often portray victims as visibly distressed, injured, or helpless. Many victims actually mask their trauma, appear composed, or even deny victimisation due to fear, shame, or manipulation. This stereotype can cause frontline responders and the public to overlook subtle cues or misjudge credibility.
4. “Justice is swift and guaranteed”	Viral posts about arrests or court cases may imply that justice is immediate and inevitable. However, many victims face long delays, systemic barriers, or lack of access to legal recourse. This distortion can create unrealistic expectations and discourage survivors who experience slow or complex legal processes.
5. “Victims are responsible for their own victimisation”	Comments and posts often blame victims for their clothing, location, gullibility, or choices, especially in cases of sexual violence or online scams. This perpetuates harmful myths and silences survivors. It also reinforces stigma, making it harder for victims to seek help or be believed.
6. “Crime only happens in ‘bad’ areas”	Social media can reinforce geographic stereotypes, suggesting that crime is confined to low-income or urban zones. In truth, crime and victimisation occur across all socioeconomic and geographic boundaries including affluent communities, campuses, and online spaces. This distortion undermines inclusive prevention and response efforts.
7. “All crime is violent”	Coverage tends to prioritize dramatic content (fights, murder, or gang-related behaviour) while ignoring quieter forms of crime (child neglect, corruption, and human smuggling).
8. “What is reported in social media must be true”	Platforms rarely provide contextual data, such as actual crime statistics or long-term trends, leading viewers to form impressions based on emotion rather than evidence.
9. “Crime only happens to certain people”	Social media can reinforce stereotypes, portraying certain schools, communities, or ethnic groups as inherently delinquent, which skews public perception and undermines nuanced understanding.

9.3 Leading the Change

When journalism follows ethical standards rooted in dignity and evidence, it becomes a powerful force for change. Accurate portrayals that highlight survivor agency, institutional failures, and community resilience build empathy without condescension. Research from international media watchdogs shows that balanced reporting correlates with greater public support for protective laws and funding for services. These outcomes do not happen by chance. They require intentional collaboration between communicators and frontline workers.

This reality calls for structured, ongoing engagement between journalists and those working directly in the field, for example MCPF members. Training sessions on trauma informed interviewing, legal boundaries, integrity, and victim confidentiality can transform how stories are told. When reporters and those who are interviewed understand the weight of language, how terms like illegal or rescue can carry unintended harm; the quality of public discourse improves significantly. These interactions must go beyond one-time briefings to become lasting partnerships built on regular information exchange.

The digital landscape adds new challenges. Algorithms reward content that triggers strong reactions, often favouring outrage over insight. As a result, even well-meant messages can be broken apart, stripped of context, or hijacked by those with different goals. This demands that those committed to protection develop media literacy not just as a skill but as a core operational function. Monitoring narratives, validating information, spotting misinformation and speculation patterns, and offering verified alternatives become essential practices.

Members of MCPF are uniquely positioned to lead transformative change in addressing the plight of victims under the TIPSOM framework. By leveraging their credibility, networks, and community presence, MCPF members can champion survivor-centered narratives, dispel harmful myths, and promote trauma-informed messaging across social media and outreach platforms. Their role in crafting culturally sensitive content, can shift public perception from blame to empathy, while reinforcing legal awareness and victim rights.

The most enduring efforts are built on mutual respect, not top-down instruction. Successful initiatives listen before they speak, allowing communities to shape how prevention messages are framed and delivered. This approach has proven especially powerful among migrant populations, where distrust of formal systems remains high. By co-designing materials with affected groups, messages gain authenticity and cultural relevance. The result is not only broader reach but deeper understanding, turning awareness into lived knowledge.

Moving forward, the most effective interventions will treat communication as a central part of prevention instead of as an afterthought. Institutional support for clear, consistent messaging across platforms helps stabilise public understanding during crises. Partnerships with researchers, civil society groups, and independent media can create networks capable of countering harmful narratives before they spread. The goal is not to control the story but to ensure truth has the infrastructure to compete.

9.4 Engaging Stakeholders in Awareness

Summarising from previous chapters, lasting change does not come from isolated efforts but from the coordinated action of diverse institutions, government agencies, religious groups, businesses, and local networks. Each of these agents bring unique strengths to a shared goal. When these groups align their messaging and outreach, their impact becomes greater than the sum of individual actions. This unity turns passive awareness into collective responsibility, making the detection and reporting of exploitation feel like a natural part of civic life rather than an extraordinary duty.

Effective engagement requires more than occasional campaigns. It demands consistent, layered communication that respects cultural contexts while holding firm to core principles. Media, schools, and faith-based organisations must work in harmony, reinforcing each other's messages without repetition. This coordination reduces public confusion and builds trust through the steady reinforcement of verified facts, not slogans. When community leaders, employers, and volunteers all describe risk

indicators in similar terms, the environment becomes less welcoming to hidden abuse. Over time, this creates a societal instinct for recognising coercion and manipulation, where suspicion becomes routine rather than rare.

These approaches depend on formal partnerships that go beyond symbolic support. Shared stakeholder efforts have enabled improved safety in neighbourhoods and transit buses in which collaborations between the police, army and neighbourhood watch teams patrol and check. Similarly, collaborations between religious communities and social services have created safe spaces for disclosure among populations hesitant to engage with official systems.

This work thrives when authority is shared yet unified in purpose. Local volunteers trained in basic recognition serve as early warning sensors, while national agencies provide legal backing and data analysis. The balance between grassroots alertness and institutional support creates resilience against evolving criminal networks. It also reduces burnout among frontline workers by spreading responsibility across a wider base. When ordinary people feel capable and empowered, not just informed; they become active guardians of safety, instead of passive recipients of messages.

However, it is important to state that no static solution will meet this challenge. As migration patterns shift and economic pressures change, so too must our methods. Emerging trends show digital platforms playing an increasing role in recruitment, requiring new forms of digital literacy among community monitors. Future progress depends on embedding these practices into everyday institutional routines, not as special projects but as standard procedures. This translates into systemic integration, where every sector from hospitality to health care carries an implicit duty to protect human dignity.

In addressing TIPSOM, on the next page, MCPF members can deliberate on what knowledge and skills are required to lead transformative change in their own locations or areas of influence. Three issues are focused on: 1) legal and policy knowledge, 2) victim identification and response, and 3) digital and community engagement.

EXERCISE: TIPSOM Knowledge & Skills Checklist for MCPF Members

Instructions: Review each item. Tick ✔ if you confidently meet the criteria or ✖ if you need further training or resources.

	STATEMENT	No	Yes
🧠	Legal & Policy Knowledge		
1	I understand the legal definitions of trafficking and smuggling under Malaysia's ATIPSOM Act 2007.		
2	I can explain the difference between a victim of trafficking and a smuggled migrant, including consent and exploitation.		
3	I am familiar with Malaysia's obligations under international instruments like the UN Palermo Protocols.		
4	I know the roles of key agencies such as MAPO, PDRM, Immigration Department, and the Ministry of Home Affairs.		
5	I can identify gaps in Malaysia's legal framework, especially regarding cyber-enabled trafficking and digital recruitment.		
🔍	Victim Identification & Response		
6	I can recognize indicators of trafficking, such as debt bondage, document confiscation, and coercive control.		
7	I understand how trauma, misinformation, and cultural norms affect victim self-identification.		
8	I know how to refer victims to appropriate shelters, legal aid, and psychosocial support services.		
9	I am trained in trauma-informed and survivor-sensitive communication.		
10	I can assess real-life scenarios and determine whether they fall under trafficking or smuggling.		
🌐	Digital & Community Engagement		
11	I understand how traffickers and smugglers use social media, messaging apps, and online platforms.		
12	I can educate communities—especially youth and migrants—about digital risks and online grooming.		
13	I have experience conducting outreach or awareness campaigns on TIPSOM in Malaysian communities.		
14	I can adapt messaging for diverse audiences, including rural populations, migrant workers, and students.		
15	I actively contribute to policy advocacy, stakeholder engagement, or inter-agency collaboration on TIPSOM issues		
	TOTAL		

Notes:

9.5 Conclusion

Tackling the complex realities of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (TIPSOM) requires more than policy frameworks. It demands a shift in mindset and behavior across all levels of society. This book has explored the multifaceted nature of TIPSOM, highlighting the vulnerabilities exploited and manipulated by perpetrators and the systemic gaps that allow these crimes to persist in Southeast Asia and beyond. Through case studies, simulation exercises, and trauma-informed strategies, MCPF members are equipped with practical tools to identify, respond to, and prevent exploitation in their respective contexts within Malaysia

To conclude, this book emphasises the critical need to address TIPSOM through both individual and collective efforts. By recognizing the significance of these actions, we can create a more informed and proactive approach to the challenges posed by TIPSOM. It is essential for individuals, particularly MCPF members, to take responsibility while also collaborating within their communities to foster greater awareness and effective solutions. This dual approach, combining personal accountability with community engagement forms the backbone of sustainable change.

Ultimately, the fight against TIPSOM is not confined to law enforcement or NGOs alone; it is a shared responsibility that calls for vigilance, empathy, and coordinated action. When individuals commit to learning and applying trauma-informed practices, and when communities unite to challenge harmful myths and support survivors, we move closer to a society that prioritises dignity and justice. Together, these efforts can lead to meaningful change and a deeper understanding of TIPSOM, benefiting society as a whole.

References

Achilli, L. (2018). The 'good' smuggler: The ethics and morals of human smuggling among Syrians. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 676(1), 77–96. Link: https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716217745867

Ahmad Effendy, A. A., & Md. Said, M. H. (2025). Concepts of crime prevention and vigilantism: Their relevancies in Malaysia's criminal procedure. *Jurnal Undang-undang dan Masyarakat*, 35(1): 1-11. Link: https://ejournal.ukm.my/ juum/article/ view/64842

Amigoni, L., & Bonnin, I. (2025). Who are the Smugglers? Ethnography on Mobility Facilitation Practices at the Sfax and Ventimiglia Borders. *Critical Criminology*, 1-20.

Angeli, F., & Afrilia, T. (2025). Economic Marginalization and Human Rights Dilemmas: Migrant in Malaysia Under the Ban of Foreign Labor Recruitment. *Perantau: Journal of Migration, Borders, and Belonging, 1(1), 24-38.*

Apene, O. Z., Blamah, N. V., & Aimufua, G. I. O. (2024). Advancements in crime prevention and detection: From traditional approaches to artificial intelligence solutions. *European Journal of Applied Science, Engineering and Technology*, *2*(2), 285-297.

Asian Development Bank (2023). *Combating Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia: Policy Recommendations and Case Studies*, https:// www.adb.org/publications/ combating-human-trafficking-southeast-asia

Aziani, A., Jofre, M., & Mancuso, M. (2025). Convergence between migrant smuggling and trafficking of goods: Text analysis of open-source data. *International Migration Review*, *59*(3), 1259-1292.

Camoens, A (13 Oct, 2025). [UPDATED] GOF crackdown exposes elaborate human-smuggling network in Selangor, Melaka. *News Straits Times.* Link: http:// www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2025/10/1293770/updated-gof-crackdown- exposes-elaborate-human-smuggling-network

Canh, L. Q., & Minh, N. H. (2025). Neighborhood Organizations, Organizational Participation, and Crime in Vietnam: An Application of the Social Disorganization Theory. *Sage Open*, *15*(3): 1-13. Link: https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440251370983

Chen, C., Dell, N., & Roesner, F. (2019). Computer security and privacy in the interactions between victim service providers and human trafficking survivors. In *28th USENIX Security Symposium (USENIX Security 19)* (pp. 89-104).

Council for Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants (MAPO). (2023). *Malaysia Annual Country Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022–2023*. Link: http://mapo.bernama.com /pdf/annualcountryreport-2023.pdf

Daigle, L. E. (2022). *Victimology: The essentials* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

den Heyer, G. (2025). Proactive Crime Control Strategies and Public Trust: Lessons Learned in the New Zealand Police. *Special Topics in Policing: Critical Issues and Global Perspectives, Volume 3*, 133-150.

Durairaja, S., Saat, G. A. M., Kamaluddin, M. R., Munesveran, N., Azmi, A. H., & Jia, L. L. (2019). Corruption in Malaysia a review. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology* 12, no. 24 (2019): 1-12.

Eck, J. E., & Clarke, R. V. (2020). Situational crime prevention: Theory, practice and evidence. In *Handbook on Crime and Deviance* (pp. 355–376). Springer. Link: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20779-3_18

Elisna, A., & Rahim, A. J. (2024). Deciphering Victim Precipitation: A New Lens on Sentencing for Sexual Violence Cases. *DAFTAR ISI*, 181-269

Engage Together (2025). Why Word Choice Matters: Human Trafficking, Smuggling, and more. Link: http://engagetogether.com/2018/04/03/trafficking-smuggling-and-more/

Europol (2019). *476 potential victims of human trafficking identified during the Large-Scale Joint Action Days 2019*. Link: //www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/476-potential-victims-of-human-trafficking-identified-during-large-scale-joint-action-days-2019

Europol (2025). Trafficking in human beings: look beyond. Link: http://www.europol.europa.eu/operations-services-and-innovation/public-awareness-and- prevention-guides/trafficking-in-human-beings-look-beyond

Farrell, A., Dank, M., De Vries, I., Kafafian, M., Hughes, A., & Lockwood, S. (2019). Failing victims? Challenges of the police response to human trafficking. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *18*(3), 649-673.

Gibbons, P., Chisolm-Straker, M., & Stoklosa, H. (2023). Human trafficking: Definitions, epidemiology, and shifting ground. In K. Titchen & E. Miller (Eds.), *Medical Perspectives on Human Trafficking in Adolescents*. Springer. Link: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43367-3_1

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2023). *Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling in Malaysia: Trends and Responses,* Link: https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/GI-Report-Malaysia-Trafficking-Smuggling.pdf

Global Shepherds Berhad & NSO-MAPO. (2023). *Victim-Centered Response to TIP Training Materials*. [Training document, unpublished]

Hachey, L. M., & Phillippi, J. C. (2017). Identification and management of human trafficking victims in the emergency department. *Advanced Emergency Nursing Journal*, *39*(1), 31-51.

Hand, M. D. (2024). Social constructions of sex trafficking and needs for a critical intersectional and trauma-informed approach: A critical review. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 35(1–2), 100–119. Link: https://doi.org/ 10.1080/10428232.2024.2355422

Hoffstaedter, G., & Missbach, A. (2021). Facilitating irregular migration into Malaysia and from Indonesia: Illicit markets, endemic corruption and symbolic attempts to overcome impunity. *Public Anthropologist*, *3*(1), 8-31. Link: https://doi. org/10.1093/bjc/azae091

Human Rights Watch (2024). *Human Rights Watch World Report 2024: Malaysia*. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/malaysia

International Justice Mission. (2023). *Malaysian law enforcement, prosecutors trained in victim-centered response to human trafficking*. Link: https:// www.ijm.org/news/malaysian-law-enforcement-prosecutors-trained-victim-centered-response-human-trafficking

International Labour Organization (2022). *Report: Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*. Link: http:// //www.ilo.org/ publications/major-publications/global-estimates-modern-slavery-forced-labour-and-forced-marriage

Interpol (2025). *Global human trafficking operation detects 1,194 potential victims, arrests 158 suspects*. Link: www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2025/ Global-human-trafficking-operation-detects-1-194-potential-victims-arrests-158-suspects

Ionaşcu, V., & Lup, B. (2025). The concept of victimological prevention of human trafficking: theoretical and practical perspectives. *Legea şi Viaţa*, (S), 174-182.

Jasni, M. A., Ah, S. H. A. B., & Nasir, N. C. M. (2020). Tough life after prison: An analysis of 19 former prisoners in Malaysia. *Journal of Community Development Research (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, *14*(1), 24-36.

Karmen, A. (2020). *Crime victims: An introduction to victimology* (9th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Kuzmanov, I. (2025). The mind hunt: Criminal profiling before artificial intelligence. *Journal of Novel Research and Innovative Development*, *3*(1), a71-a87.

Lelliott, J., & Miller, R. (2023). The nexus between corruption, migrant smuggling, and human trafficking in Southeast Asia. In *Migration in Southeast Asia: IMISCOE regional reader* (pp.195-215). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Leukfeldt, E. R., & Yar, M. (2016). Applying Routine Activity Theory to cybercrime: A theoretical and empirical analysis. *Deviant Behavior, 37*(3), 263–280. Link: https:// doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2015 .1012409

Liu, T. Z. (2024). The causes of human smuggling (Indonesia-Malaysia) and the policies taken by the Indonesian government to overcome it. *Journal of Social Political Sciences*, *5*(2), 123-149.

M.L. McAuliffe and F. Laczko (Eds) (2023). *Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: A Global Review of the Emerging Evidence Base*. International Organization for Migration. Link: https:////publications.iom.int/fr/system/files/pdf/smuggling _report.pdf

Mahari, H. (June 24, 2024). USTIP Report: Malaysia upgraded to Tier 2 [Updated]. *New Straits Times*. Link: https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2024/06/ 1067911/ ustip-report-malaysia-upgraded-tier-2-updated

Maidin, M. R., Hussin, M. F., Zakaria, N. A. Z., Rahim, S. A. E. A., & Samsudin, K. (2024). The Need for Integrated Crime Risk Assessment Systems Using Data-Driven Strategies for Crime Prevention in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 14*(11), 996-1005.

Malay Mail (Jan 30, 2023). *Home Ministry sec-gen moots setting up survivor centred and trauma informed services to protect human trafficking victims*. Link: http//www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2023/01/30/home-ministry-sec-gen-moots- setting-up -survivor-centred-and-trauma-informed-services-to-protect-human-trafficking-victims/52615

Malay Mail. (Feb 14, 2025). *Two smugglers, 20 undocumented migrants caught in human trafficking bust at Kelantan hotel*. Link: https://www.malaymail.com/ news/malaysia/2025/02/14/two-smugglers-20-undocumented-migrants-caught-in-human-trafficking-bust-at-kelantan-hotel/166610

Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation (2023). *Annual Report 2023*, Link: https://www.mcpf.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/MCPF-Annual-Report-2023.pdf

Malik, P., & Singh, J. (2023). Micro expression recognition—Contemporary applications and algorithms. *AIP Conference Proceedings*, 2916(1), 030018. Link: https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0177481

MAPO. (2023). *Annual Country Report on Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Malaysia 2022–2023*. Link: http://mapo.bernama.com/pdf/annualcountryreport-2023.pdf

Mohamed Apandi, A. (2024). Where Malaysia stands in the human trafficking and migrant smuggling ordeal. *INSAF | The Journal of the Malaysian Bar*, *40*(1), 28-57. Link: https://insaf.malaysian bar.org.my/ojs/index.php/jmr/article/view/66

Moore, D. M. (2024). Algorithmic exploitation in social media human trafficking and strategies for regulation. *Laws*, *13*(3), Article 31. 1-10

Movsisyan, S. (2018). Human Trafficking in a digital age: who should be held accountable? *Mich. St. Int'l L. Rev.*, *27*: 539-592.

Nasir, N. H. B. (2022). The exploitation of refugees in Malaysia from 2017 until 2022. *Conflict and Peace Studies Journal*, 125-144.

Nawawi, M. H., & Fadzil, M. H. (2025, April 13). *4 gangs linked to migrant smuggling network, says IGP*. New Straits Times. Link: https://www.nst.com.my/news/crime-courts/2025/04/1201554/4-gangs-linked-migrant-smuggling-network-says-igp

Nee, W. Y., Singh, J. S. K., & Kularajasingam, J. (2022). Exploring the Perceptions of Malaysian Employers Towards Hiring Ex-Offenders. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, *12*(3), 118-118.

Nevia, G., & Perkasa, A. W. A. P. (2024). Strategies For Preventing Exploitation of Non-Procedural Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) Based on Routine Activity Theory. *Journal of Law, Politic and Humanities*, *4*(4), 625-634.

Pahlevi, R. (2024). Customs Intelligence Strategy Encountering Smuggling Threats in a Changing World. *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*, *16*(431): 1087-1109

Pascual-Leone, A., Kim, J., & Morrison, O.-P. (2023). Working with victims of human trafficking. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, *47*(1), 51–59. Link: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10879-016-9338-3

Peras, I., Pivec, T., Kališnik, A., & Košir, K. (2025). Identifying adolescents' victimization experiences: A latent profile analysis approach. *Current Psychology*, 44, 847–863. Link:https://doi.org/10. 1007/s12144-024-07152-5

Polis Diraja Malaysia. (2017). *Polis Telah Selamatkan 250 Mangsa Pemerdagangan Orang Di Sabah Dalam Tahun Ini*. Link: http://www.rmp.gov.my/news-detail/2017/05/11/polis-telah-selamatkan-250-mangsa-pemerdagangan-orang-di-sabah-dalam-tahun-ini

Polis Diraja Malaysia. (2020). OP BENTENG: 300 "Wira Hutan" Pdrm Kawal SempadanDaratan Malaysia-Thailand. *Berita Bukit Aman Bil 3/2020*. Link: http://www.rmp.gov.my/docs/default-source/Penerbitan/berita-bukit-aman-bil-3-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=2

Polis Diraja Malaysia. (2025). *Artikel Pilihan: 144 Mangsa Pemerdangangan Manusia Diselamatkan Pdrm, 249 Individu Ditahan – KPN*. Link: http:// // www.rmp.gov.my/news-detail/2025/05/28/artikel-pilihan-144-mangsa-pemerdangangan-manusia-diselamatkan-pdrm-249-individu-ditahan---kpn

Quan, J., Duan, Y., & Fu, Q. (2025). Enhancing national security: A multidimensional situational awareness model for emerging economic crime prevention. *International Journal of Information Security, 24*, Article 222. 1-24. Link: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10207-025-01136-7

Quinney, B., Wenzel, M., Okimoto, T. G., Thai, M., & Woodyatt, L. (2025). Transformative Moral Repair Following Interpersonal Transgressions: Post-Transgression Relationship Growth. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 1-15

Quraishi, M. (2020). 'Criminology' in Malaysia. In *Towards a Malaysian Criminology* (pp. 29–60). Palgrave Macmillan. Link: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/978-1-137-49101-5_3

Rahman, R., Abd Rahaman, M. A., Saleh, N. S., & Wahidi, R. (2025). Sexual Exploitation in the Women Trafficking in Klang Valley, Malaysia: Challenges and Recommendations. *Journal of Social Transformation and Regional Development*, *7*(1), 40-43.

Ramli, F. Z. A., Saad, Z. M., Jamaluddin, Z., Zain, R. M., Abd Manaf, A. R., & Zakuan, U. A. A. (2024). Social Impact of Illegal Immigrants on the Macro System in Malaysia: A Meta-Analysis. *International Journal of Social Policy and Society (IJSPS)*, *20*, 69-87.

Richie-Zavaleta, A. C., Baranik, S., Mersch, S., Ataiants, J., & Rhodes, S. M. (2021). From victimization to restoration: Multi-disciplinary collaborative approaches to care and support victims and survivors of human trafficking. *Journal of human trafficking*, *7*(3), 291-307.

Rivera, C. M., Morales, A. L., & Torres, M. A. (2024). Proactive Policing Strategies: Leveraging Public Data for Commercial Burglary Prevention in Mexico. *International Journal of Social Sciences, Language and Linguistics*, *4*(04), 01-07.

Romanowska, K. (2024). Addressing human trafficking in the digital era: Amendments to the EU anti-trafficking directive:[Handel ludźmi w erze cyfrowej. Zmiany w dyrektywie UE w sprawie handlu ludźmi]. *Studia Prawnicze/The Legal Studies*, (2 (230)), 185-202.

Rossoni, I., Büyükkalkan, O., & Erken, U. (2024). An Image Is Worth a Thousand Words: Exploring Visual Imagery About Trafficking in the Online Domain–an Italian Case Study. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 1-23.

Sanchez, G. (2017). Critical perspectives on clandestine migration facilitation: An overview of migrant smuggling research. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, *5*(1), 9-27.

Saville, G., & Mihinjac, M. (2022). Third-generation CPTED—Integrating crime prevention and neighbourhood liveability. In Saraiva, M. (Ed.), *Urban Crime Prevention: Multi-disciplinary Approaches* (pp. 27–54). Springer. Link: https:// doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15108-8_3

SUHAKAM (2025). *Human Trafficking*. Link: http://suhakam.org.my/ portfolio / human-trafficking/

SUHAKAM (2024). *SUHAKAM Report on Human Trafficking and Migrant Workers 2024*, https://www.suhakam.org.my/en/reports

The Straits Times (March 25, 2023). 5 Malaysian immigration officers arrested for alleged migrant smuggling. The Straits Times. Link: http://www.straitstimes .com/ asia/se-asia/5-malaysian-immigration-officers-arrested-for-alleged-migrant-smuggling

Theologi, V. (2025). From detection to protection: artificial intelligence and victim management in urban vulnerability contexts. *Urban Crime. An international Journal*, *6*(1), 4-37.

Thomas, A. L. (2025). Evaluating the effect of CCTV on case clearances in Fayetteville, NC: A case for entropy balancing. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 1-26.

Thomas, C., Jeong, J., & Wolff, K. T. (2025). Testing Routine Activity Theory: Behavioural Pathways Linking Temperature to Crime, *The British Journal of Criminology*, 65(4): 859–877.

Transparentem (2024). Paying to Work. Link: https://transparentem.org/wp-content/ uploads/ 2024/10/Malaysia-Report_Paying-to-Work_Forced-Labor-Indicators-and-Exploitative-Recruitment-Practices-in-the-Malaysian-Apparel-Industry.pdf

U.S. Embassy in Malaysia. (2022). *2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Malaysia*. https://my.us embassy.gov/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report-malaysia/

U.S. Embassy in Malaysia. (2023). *2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Malaysia*. https://my.us mbassy.gov/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report-malaysia/

U.S. Department of State. (2024). *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Malaysia*. https://my.usembassy.gov/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report-malaysia/

U.S. Embassy in Malaysia. (2025). *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Malaysia*. https://my.usembassy.gov/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report-malaysia/

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2011). *First Aid Kit for Use by Law Enforcement First Responders in Addressing Human Trafficking*. Link:http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/2011/first-aid-kit.html

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022), *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* Link: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip.html

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2025). *Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling*. Link: http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/index.html

Von Hentig, H. (1948). *The Criminal and His Victim: Studies in the Sociobiology of Crime*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Wang, J., Park, M., & Lee, J. (2025). Tracing disorder: Environmental catalysts for misdemeanors and felonies in Chicago. *Applied Spatial Analysis and Policy, 18*, Article 125. Link: https://doi.org/ 10.1007/s12061-025-09723-w

Wei, S., Jiang, A., Hu, Q., Liang, B., & Xu, J. (2025). Conducting criminological fieldwork in China: A comprehensive review and reflection on power relations in the field. *Criminology & criminal justice*, *25*(4), 1224-1243.

Wen, Y., Qia, H., Long, T., & Zhang, X. (2025). Designed for safety: Characteristics and trends in crime prevention through environmental design research. *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering, 24*(4), 3108–3126. https://doi. org/10 . 1080/ 13467581.2024.2366823

Wolfgang, M. E. (1958). *Patterns in Criminal Homicide*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc .

World Bank Migration and Development Brief 36: Regional Focus on Asia Pacific (2024),https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/ document detail/ 9781464819998/migration-and-development-brief-36

Yang, Y. (2024). Micro-expressions: A Study of Basic Reading and The Influencing Factors on Production and Recognition. *J. Educ. Humanit. Soc. Sci*, *26*, 1048-1053.

Zhang, F., & Chai, L. (2024). A review of research on micro-expression recognition algorithms based on deep learning. *Neural Computing and Applications*, 36, 17787–17828. https://doi.org/10.1007/ s00521-024-10262-7

Zhang, S. X., & Sanchez, G. (2021). Migrant smuggling as a violent enterprise. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 76(3), 245–263. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-021-09939-2

Zulkifli, N., Mustapha, S. Z., Johari, N. F., Hassan, M. S., Yaacob, N., & Noor, N. R. A. M. (2024). Global Smuggling Research Trends: A Bibliometric Analysis of an Untold Story. In *Board Diversity and Corporate Governance* (pp. 653-661). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A: Author Details

Assoc Prof Dr Geshina Ayu MAT SAAT	Forensic Science Programme, School of Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia Health Campus, MALAYSIA E: geshina@usm.my
Assist Prof Dr Suzanie Adina MAT SAAT	Department of Marketing, College of Business Administration, Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA E: ssaat@psu.edu.sa
Dr Aniza Heidi MAT SAAT	Australasian College of Health and Wellness, Melbourne, AUSTRALIA E: msjamd@yahoo.com
Olusoga Tasiru SHITTU	Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil-Kano, NIGERIA E: olusogashittu@polac.edu.ng
ANG Shu Yen	Forensic Science Programme, School of Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia Health Campus, MALAYSIA E: angshuyen@student.usm.my
Nadiah Syariani MD SHARIFF	Department of Forensic Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Manipal University College, MALAYSIA E: nadiah_shariff@manipal.edu.my

Appendix B

Explanations Regarding Exercise of TIPSOM Knowledge

Myths About Human Trafficking

1. Myth: Human trafficking is the same as migrant smuggling.
   Reality: Trafficking is exploitation-based and does not require border crossing. Smuggling involves consent and illegal movement across borders.

2. Myth: All trafficking involves physical violence or kidnapping.
   Reality: Many traffickers use psychological coercion, manipulation, or fraud rather than physical force.

3. Myth: Only women and girls are trafficked.
   Reality: Men and boys are also victims, especially in labour trafficking and sometimes in sex trafficking.

4. Myth: Victims must be undocumented immigrants.
   Reality: Victims can be citizens, legal residents, or undocumented individuals.

5. Myth: Trafficking only happens in illegal or underground industries.
   Reality: It occurs in legitimate sectors like agriculture, hospitality, construction, and domestic work.

6. Myth: All commercial sex is human trafficking.
   Reality: Only when it involves minors or adults coerced through force, fraud, or manipulation.

7. Myth: Victims always try to escape or seek help.
   Reality: Many are afraid, manipulated, or lack access to help due to threats or control over documents.

8. Myth: Trafficking requires movement across borders.
   Reality: Victims can be trafficked within their own communities or even homes.

9. Myth: Consent at any point negates trafficking.
   Reality: Initial consent is irrelevant if force, fraud, or coercion is later used.

10. Myth: Trafficking is always linked to organised crime.
    Reality: Individuals, including family members or acquaintances, can be traffickers without ties to criminal networks.

Myth about Migrant Smuggling

1. Myth: Smuggled migrants are always victims of trafficking.
   Reality: While some smuggled migrants may later become trafficking victims, smuggling itself involves consent and payment for transportation. Trafficking involves exploitation, often without consent.

2. Myth: Smuggling ends once migrants reach their destination.
   Reality: Many migrants face ongoing risks—debt bondage, extortion, or coercion—long after arrival. Smugglers may continue to exploit them or hand them over to traffickers.

3. Myth: Smuggling is always organised by criminal syndicates.
   Reality: While organized crime plays a role, many smugglers are individuals or small networks, including community members or even family acquaintances.

4. Myth: Smuggled migrants are criminals.
   Reality: Migrants may break immigration laws, but they are not criminals in the moral sense. Many are fleeing conflict, poverty, or persecution and have limited legal options.

5. Myth: Smuggling only happens across international borders.
   Reality: Smuggling can occur within countries too—especially in regions with internal checkpoints or restricted movement zones.

Appendix C: Structured Profiling

Trafficking Story 1: Somchai— "The Charmer Behind the Job Offer"
Title: *The Opportunity Broker*

👤 Demographics

- Name: Somchai
- Age: 34
- Gender: Male
- Nationality: Thai
- Occupation: Freelance recruiter for hospitality jobs in Thailand and Penang

🧠 Personality Traits

- Highly charismatic and persuasive; uses charm to build trust quickly
- Narcissistic tendencies; believes he's "helping" victims by giving them "opportunities"
- Emotionally detached from consequences; rationalizes exploitation as business
- Skilled in digital manipulation—uses multiple social media profiles and fake job ads

🏠 Family Dynamics

- Eldest of five siblings; grew up in a financially strained household
- Father was a strict disciplinarian; mother emotionally distant
- Family unaware of his activities but admire his "success" and frequent travel
- No spouse or children; maintains emotional distance from long-term relationships

👫 Social Circles

- Connected to informal recruiter networks in Kota Bharu and Hat Yai
- Maintains ties with mid-level hotel managers and transport operators
- Avoids close friendships; prefers transactional relationships
- Occasionally collaborates with foreign nationals for cross-border movement

🧩 Behavioral Cues for Profiling

- Uses WhatsApp and Telegram for encrypted communication
- Frequently changes phone numbers and SIM cards
- Avoids direct involvement in exploitation sites; delegates control to others
- Seen at local cafes with young foreign women but claims to be "mentoring" them

Training Cues:

- Watch for grooming via digital platforms and false job offers.
- Note the use of layered delegation to obscure direct exploitation.
- Profile emotional detachment masked by charisma and "helpful" language.

Trafficking Story 2: Siti Noraini — "The Matriarch of Domestic Control"
Title: *The House of Discipline*

👤 Demographics
- Name: Siti Noraini binti Mahmud
- Age: 52
- Gender: Female
- Nationality: Malaysian (Selangor)
- Occupation: Owner of a chain of cleaning service agencies

🧠 Personality Traits
- Authoritarian and controlling; believes in rigid hierarchy
- Justifies exploitation as "discipline" and "training"
- Highly organized and meticulous; keeps detailed records of workers' movements
- Lacks empathy; views foreign domestic workers as inferior and replaceable

🏠 Family Dynamics
- Widow with two adult children—both involved in the business
- Family supports her methods and sees her as a "strong leader"
- History of domestic violence in her marriage; normalized coercion as survival
- Uses family-run business to mask trafficking operations

👫 Social Circles
- Well-connected to local politicians and enforcement officers
- Attends religious and community events to maintain a respectable image
- Employs former victims as "supervisors" to control new recruits
- Uses religious rhetoric to justify obedience and silence

🧩 Behavioral Cues for Profiling
- Keeps workers' passports "for safekeeping"
- Uses CCTV and timed schedules to monitor movement
- Offers "loans" that trap workers in debt bondage
- Avoids digital communication; prefers verbal orders and handwritten logs

Training Cues:
- Profile coercion masked as mentorship and religious discipline.
- Observe use of family-run business structures to obscure trafficking.
- Note how community respectability can shield perpetrators from scrutiny.

Trafficking Story 3: Tonia – "The Saviour of Benin"
Title: *Improving Lives*

👤 Demographics

- Name/Alias: Tonia "Madam T"
- Age: 34
- Gender: Female
- Nationality: Nigerian
- Region of Origin: Benin City, Edo State — a known trafficking hotspot
- Education: Dropped out of secondary school at 16
- Migration History: Nigeria → Dubai → Thailand → Malaysia (via land and air routes)
- Legal Status: Undocumented or using forged documents; multiple aliases across borders
- Self-Description: "Businesswoman," "mentor," "provider," often reframing her role as empowerment

🧠 Personality Traits

- Charismatic & persuasive: Skilled in emotional manipulation, aspirational messaging, and grooming
- Emotionally compartmentalized: Rationalizes coercion as survival or opportunity
- High adaptive intelligence: Navigates visa loopholes, border systems, and informal economies
- Narcissistic tendencies: Sees herself as a "rescuer" and gatekeeper to success
- Control-oriented: Uses debt bondage, spiritual fear (juju), misinformation, and peer pressure
- Risk-tolerant: Operates across borders, adapts quickly to enforcement changes, and replaces lost recruits efficiently
- Image-conscious: Maintains a curated online persona to reinforce credibility and allure

🏠 Family Dynamics

- Upbringing: Raised in poverty by a single mother and an aunt who ran a roadside bar
- Parental roles: Father absent; mother emotionally distant and financially dependent
- Intergenerational influence: Aunt introduced her to informal hospitality and survival tactics
- Family expectations: Pressured to send remittances and "lift the family" economically
- Secrecy & denial: Family may suspect her activities but avoids confrontation due to financial dependence
- Identity framing: Sees herself as the "strategist" and "provider," masking trauma with control

👫 Social Circles

- Recruitment zones: Salons, churches, youth centers, Instagram, and WhatsApp job groups
- Target profile: Girls aged 16–22 with low self-esteem, financial desperation, or family pressure
- Network structure: Loosely organized trafficking ring with fixers, document forgers, and safehouse operators across Southeast Asia
- Communication style: Uses coded language, spiritual rhetoric, and motivational posts
- Loyalty mechanisms: Promises of independence, fear of deportation, spiritual manipulation, and cultural brotherhood
- Digital footprint: Active on social media, portraying luxury and success to attract recruits

Training Cues:

- Justification Through Empowerment
- Intergenerational Conditioning
- Spiritual Control Mechanisms
- Digital Persona vs Operational Reality

Smuggling Story 1: Rajendran a/l Muniandy — "The Tamil Transporter"
Title: *The Route of Routine*

👤 Demographics
- Name: Rajendran a/l Muniandy
- Age: 42
- Ethnicity: Malaysian Indian (Tamil)
- Occupation: Lorry driver and informal logistics coordinator for undocumented labour routes
- Location: Based in Sungai Petani, Kedah

🧠 Personality Traits
- Street-smart and pragmatic; avoids unnecessary risks
- Highly loyal to his network but distrustful of outsiders
- Justifies smuggling as "helping poor workers find jobs"
- Emotionally compartmentalized; sees migrants as cargo, not people

🏠 Family Dynamics
- Married with two teenage children; wife runs a tailoring shop
- Family believes he works in cross-border delivery
- Brother-in-law is involved in document forgery for migrant IDs
- Children are unaware of his activities but benefit from his income

👫 Social Circles
- Deep ties with plantation owners and labour contractors in Perak and Penang
- Maintains informal alliances with enforcement officers through bribes and favours
- Regularly attends temple events and community fundraisers to maintain a "clean" image
- Uses WhatsApp groups with coded Tamil phrases to coordinate pickups

🧩 Behavioral Cues for Profiling
- Routinely modifies vehicle license plates and routes
- Seen at rest stops with groups of foreign nationals but claims they're "workers on contract"
- Keeps burner phones and avoids digital trails
- Uses religious and cultural events to mask coordination meetings

Training Cues:
- Watch for family-enabled logistics and document forgery.
- Note the use of cultural events to mask coordination.
- Profile emotional detachment masked by community service language.

Smuggling Story 2: Lim Wei Seng "The Sino-Thai Broker"
Title: *The Spreadsheet Smuggler*

👤 Demographics
- Name: Lim Wei Seng
- Age: 36
- Ethnicity: Malaysian Chinese (Hokkien)
- Occupation: Cross-border fixer and transport arranger for undocumented migrants from Thailand and Myanmar
- Location: Based in Bukit Kayu Hitam, Kedah

🧠 Personality Traits
- Highly organized and strategic; treats smuggling like a business
- Charismatic and persuasive; fluent in Thai, Burmese, and Hokkien
- Emotionally detached; views migrants as "units" in a supply chain
- Risk-tolerant but avoids direct confrontation with authorities

🏠 Family Dynamics
- Single; lives with elderly parents who believe he works in import-export
- Cousin in Hat Yai helps coordinate border crossings
- Parents are proud of his "success" and frequent travel
- No children; maintains multiple short-term relationships

👫 Social Circles
- Connected to Thai transport syndicates and Malaysian document forgers
- Maintains ties with hotel owners and van drivers across northern Malaysia
- Uses karaoke lounges and massage parlours as meeting points
- Avoids religious or community events; prefers low-profile venues

🧩 Behavioral Cues for Profiling
- Uses encrypted apps like Signal and Line for coordination
- Routinely changes meeting locations and pickup times
- Seen at border towns with rotating groups of migrants
- Keeps detailed logs of routes, payments, and "client profiles" in coded spreadsheets

Training Cues:
- Profile strategic detachment and coded logistics.
- Observe use of non-traditional meeting spaces and encrypted tools.
- Note how business language masks exploitation.

Smuggling Story 3: Uncle Rizal – "The Smooth Sailor"
Title: *Riding the High Seas*

👤 **Demographics**

- Name/Alias: Rizal bin Hamzah, known as "Uncle Rizal"
- Age: 41
- Gender: Male
- Nationality: Malaysian
- Ethnicity: Malay
- Region of Origin: Klang, Selangor — a port city with high maritime activity
- Education: Dropped out of secondary school at age 15
- Occupation (Self-described): "Connector," "logistics man," "problem solver"
- Migration Links: Coordinates routes from Malaysia to Australia via Indonesia, often using small boats and informal border crossings
- Legal Status**:** Operates in legal grey zones; uses forged documents and proxy identities

🧠 **Personality Traits**

- Pragmatic & calculating: Views smuggling as a business, not a crime
- Emotionally compartmentalized: Justifies risk and harm as necessary trade-offs
- High situational intelligence: Skilled in reading people, navigating systems, and avoiding detection
- Low empathy but high relational skill: Builds trust through religious language and cultural familiarity
- Risk-tolerant: Willing to lose boats or clients if it protects the larger operation
- Image-conscious: Avoids flashy displays; maintains a low profile to avoid suspicion
- Respected in his circles: Seen as reliable, discreet, and resourceful

🏠 **Family Dynamics**

- Upbringing: Grew up in a working-class family near the docks
- Parental roles: Father was a dockworker with informal maritime knowledge; mother sold food to port labourers
- Early exposure: Learned smuggling logistics from relatives involved in informal trade
- Family expectations: Seen as the financial backbone; provides for siblings and extended family
- Intergenerational silence: Family avoids questioning his income sources due to economic dependence
- Family involvement: Brother assists with logistics; cousin in Medan handles Indonesian coordination

🧑‍🤝‍🧑 **Social Circles**

- Recruitment zones: Mosques, construction sites, informal settlements, and WhatsApp groups
- Client profile: Undocumented migrants from Rohingya, Bangladeshi, West African communities
- Network structure: Decentralized but loyal; includes document forgers, boat operators, and safehouse keepers
- Communication style: Uses coded language, religious framing, and promises of dignity and opportunity
- Trust mechanisms: Builds rapport through shared cultural values and survival narratives
- Digital footprint: Minimal; relies on burner phones and encrypted messaging apps

Training Cues:

- Familial Normalization of Illicit Trade
- Religious Framing for Trust-Building
- Low-Profile Operational Tactics
- Justification Through Dignity Narratives

In an era where the shadows of crime loom larger than ever, "Smuggled Lives, Stolen Futures: A Crime Prevention Module for MCPF Members" emerges as a vital resource for those on the front lines of safeguarding communities. This book addresses the pressing issues of human trafficking, smuggling, and the broader implications of organised crime, providing a comprehensive framework for the Members of the Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF) to combat these pervasive threats. With a focus on actionable strategies and real-world applications, it aims to empower community leaders and members to reclaim stolen futures and protect vulnerable lives.

Structured into key thematic sections, the book delves into the context of smuggling and trafficking, examining the socio-economic factors that fuel these crimes. It explores the psychological and cultural dimensions of victimisation, offering insights into the profiles of both perpetrators and victims. Each chapter is designed to build upon the last, guiding readers through a progressive approach that includes risk assessment, community engagement, and inter-agency collaboration. The book also highlights current trends in crime prevention, drawing on case studies and research to illustrate successful interventions and
innovative practices.

"Smuggled Lives, Stolen Futures" not only serves as a manual but also as a call to action for MCPF members and allied professionals. By equipping readers with the knowledge and tools necessary to address these complex issues, the ebook fosters a proactive mindset that prioritises prevention over reaction. It underscores the importance of community involvement and the role of education in dismantling the networks that perpetuate crime. The potential impact of this work is profound, as it seeks to inspire a new generation of crime prevention
advocates who are equipped to challenge the status quo and effect meaningful change.

This book stands out in its commitment to blending rigorous research with practical application, making it an essential addition to the libraries of law enforcement agencies, policymakers, and community organisations. By addressing the multifaceted nature of crime and its consequences, "Smuggled Lives, Stolen Futures" not only informs but also inspires action, making it a crucial resource in the ongoing fight against crime. The insights and strategies presented within its pages are poised to transform the landscape of crime prevention, ensuring that lives are not only protected but also empowered to thrive.

eISBN: