

CASE 3

Sector: Massage Parlor, Sex Industry

- Read the case below
- How should Meng and Tam have been assisted?

Background:

"Meng's Story"

(Adapted from The Mekong Children's Forum)

Like most of the other children in her village, Meng dreamed of leaving home one day and crossing the border to the neighboring country. In the village, the only work was farming and a hard life with no money.

A lot of girls from the village migrated across the border to find work. Some of them came back to visit, wearing fashionable new clothes, bringing gifts for their friends and money for their parents.

When Meng was 15, her best friend Tam showed her a letter from her (Tam's) sister, Ae, who had gone across the border. Ae said she worked in a massage parlour. She said some of her customers were rich and she was able to save a lot of money. If any of Tam's friends wanted to go across the border, Ae would help them. Ae and her new husband came to the village a month later. Meng told Ae she wanted to work in a massage parlour. Two days later, Meng, Tam and three other girls climbed into the back of Ae's husband's pick-up truck. They were all very excited and dressed in their best clothes. This was the start of their new life.

Two nights later, they arrived in a city. The car stopped at a big massage parlour. Ae told the girls to go inside. Inside smelled very bad. Meng saw a brightly lit window, and behind it rows of girls in short dresses with numbers around their necks. They wore a lot of make-up and looked unhappy. Meng and Tam started to feel very uncomfortable. This was different from what Ae had described.

That night, lying on a small bed in a room with some other girls, Ae told Meng and Tam about the work. They would have to massage men and have sex with them. Ae said the owner had paid her to find new girls. Meng and Tam cried that night, and many nights afterwards. Meng and Tam worked in the massage parlour for several months. They never ran away, because Ae said the boss would find them and punish them.

Police Intervention:

One night, the police raided the massage parlour. The customers ran away. But the police took all the girls to an immigration detention centre. The girls had to pay a big fine.

Two months later, the police took Meng and Tam back to the border and told them to go back to their own country. On the other side of the border, the border guards took some more of their money.

Meng and Tam were too ashamed to go back to their village. As soon as they could, they found someone else to take them back across the border.