

Sumalee was trafficked from Thailand to Japan in 1995. She told her story to Thailand's Foundation of Women, in Bangkok.

Sumalee

After leaving a primary school, I helped my parents do some domestic chores and worked in the paddy field. My friend told me that she was going to work in Japan and persuaded me to go with her. I decided to go with her. But I told my mother I went to work in Bangkok.

When we arrived in Japan, the weather was so cold. An agent chose me and my friend and sent us to Tokyo. Other women were sent to rural areas. The agent told us that each of us owed him 500,000 Thai Baht (\$20,000). We were taken to a bar where inside we could see thirty Thai women singing and talking to customers. A man who was in charge of the bar told me to sit with one of the customers who had already paid him 30,000 Yen (\$300). After that, he ordered me to go out with that customer.

Many times I saw Yakuza or the Japanese gangsters rush into the bar. One day, three of Yakuza came in and took three Thai women out. The women returned to the bar with tears. One woman had had her throat tickled with a knife and was forced to have oral sex. Another woman was forced to get into the bathtub, and then the man urinated on her face. Sometimes, while I was staying with a customer in a room, I heard my colleague screaming for help in Thai from a room near by. But my customer forbade me to do anything about it or I myself would receive the same awful treatment.

There were some women who ran away. The boss paid Yakuza to trace them and return them for punishment. They locked the woman up in a small room in which she had to sleep with any customers they commanded. If she disobeyed, she would have only one choice-death. Since arriving to work in Japan, I cried a lot although normally I did not cry easily.

One day when we were walking, two policemen came to hold our arms and asked us to show them our passports. We told them that we left them in our room but in fact, our visas had expired a long time ago. We were taken to a Police Station. There were about 200 women inside and we were investigated. Most of the Thai women had been there for two or three months. They said that they couldn't afford any air tickets so they were waiting for help from the Thai Embassy. One morning, the immigration policeman called our names telling us that we could go back home. I was so delighted but when I saw many of my fellow countrywomen who were not called crying, I felt sympathy for them but couldn't provide any help.

I was deported. After working in these conditions I arrived in Thailand empty handed. All my work, my traumatic experience, was for nothing. At present I stay with my parents and my little nephews in my village. I make my living from a small grocery and do some agriculture. All of this work requires labor, endurance and some capital. But everyone of us who was born in this world has to struggle and work hard in order to live in this world. I also give my time working on the committee for the women's group in my village. Though it is just a small thing, I hope it can be useful for the community.