

# Weekly Observer

Stay in the know

## IT COULD BE ANYONE

Real stories of Basotho  
trafficked by those  
they trusted

A powerful exposé on how human trafficking  
hides in plain sight – through jobs, churches,  
sports, and relationships

Trafficking wears many faces

### COLUMNS FEATURED:

- BEAUTIFUL DREAMS SOCIETY
- MISA LESOTHO
- LESOTHO SPORTS & RECREATION COMMISSION
- BARALI FOUNDATION
- CYBERSECURITY ANALYST
- NETWORK OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT OF LESOTHO

# Understanding Human Trafficking

...with ‘Masentle Gladys Makara| Outreach & Communications Officer at Beautiful Dreams Society

## What is Human Trafficking?

At Beautiful Dream Society, we define human trafficking in accordance with Lesotho’s Counter Trafficking in Persons Act of 2011, which adopts the internationally recognized Palermo Protocol definition. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by means of threat, use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, or deception for the purpose of exploitation. In Lesotho, this exploitation includes forced labor, sexual exploitation, removal of organs, and servitude. It is modern-day slavery. Traffickers frequently prey on vulnerable people, often deceiving them with false promises of employment, education, or better living opportunities, particularly in urban areas or abroad.

## Most Common Forms of Trafficking in Lesotho

At Beautiful Dream Society, the most frequently observed cases include sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Increasingly, traffickers use social media platforms such as Facebook to recruit victims. They often create fake job advertisements, offering high salaries or overseas opportunities that seem too good to be true. Tactics may include urging individuals to inbox privately after commenting on public posts, which creates secrecy and limits accountability, common red flags for fake opportunities and trafficking scams.

## Recent Statistics: Cases Handled by BDS

As of 2025, Beautiful Dream Society is aware of 19 suspected cases of human trafficking in Lesotho, some of which are currently before the courts, while others remain under police investigation. In addition, we have supported 9 cases involving minor sexual assault.

While these figures do not represent the full extent of trafficking in the country, due to the hidden nature of the crime, they reflect the urgent need for continued prevention, protection, and legal action. BDS remains committed to working with law enforcement, government, and communities to identify victims, support survivors, and pursue justice.

## Warning Signs: How to Spot a Potential Victim

- This Several indicators can signal that someone may be experiencing trafficking, such as:
- Inconsistent or suspicious personal stories
  - Possession of fake or no identification documents
  - Minors traveling with adults who are not their legal guardians
  - Individuals appearing fearful, withdrawn, or overly submissive
  - Sudden or suspicious marriages after a very short relationship
  - Unrealistic job offers on social media, especially with high pay, vague details, or demands to “inbox only” for more information
  - Recognizing these signs early is crucial to prevention and rescue

## About Beautiful Dream Society

Beautiful Dream Society (BDS) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 2010 with a mission to combat human trafficking in Lesotho. In 2011, BDS established the country’s first shelter for victims of trafficking, offering a comprehensive range of services including emergency support, trauma recovery, and reintegration.

In 2013, we expanded to open a Children’s Home, and by 2021, BDS launched a Border Screening Program to help identify potential trafficking cases at key entry and exit points.

- BDS’s holistic model includes:**
- Safe shelter for female survivors and sexually abused minors
  - Psychosocial counseling and trauma-informed care
  - Legal support and advocacy
  - Education and vocational training
  - Support for business start-ups
  - Family reunification and family strengthening programs
- Our work aims to restore dignity and hope to survivors, helping them to rebuild their lives and reintegrate safely into society.



# Behind the Guest House Gates: A Story of Exploitation, Fear, and Silence

TS'EPISO SERABELE

LERIBE

“He said if she aborted, he’d kill her.”

These are the words of 'Masechaba's mother (not her real name), whose daughter was sexually exploited.

'Masechaba is a 31-year-old woman who was sexually exploited by her boss — a man known in town for his businesses, and feared for the power he wields behind the scenes. She already had a child when she left home in search of work. Her second child, born from that ordeal, just turned one.

What first seemed to be a decent job, turned out to be a continued nightmare, not just for her, but for many others trapped in a system of fear, corruption, and alleged trafficking.

In October 2023, 'Masechaba was desperate for work when a friend told her about a housekeeping job at Khune Village in Welkom. The opportunity came through a chain: a colleague's cousin had mentioned the job to the colleague, who then told 'Masechaba's friend. Although the friend had been approached first, she recommended 'Masechaba instead, as she was unemployed at the time.

With nothing but a blanket, 'Masechaba left Lesotho and caught a ride with another lady going for the same job. They were told food and transport would be provided, though it would later be deducted from their salaries. A man, arranged by the employer, picked them up in Maputsoe and handed them over at Khune Village — a move she now believes was part of a larger human trafficking operation.

Upon arrival in Khune Village—a liquor establishment connected to a 'guest-house', things quickly turned dark. 'Masechaba and the lady she arrived with were separated. She was told she'd earn M2,500 monthly, but would be borrowed anything she needed, which would later be deducted from her salary with a steep 35% interest.

The following day, the man who owned the facility — the same man who was her employer, demanded to sleep with her. When she refused, he forced himself on her. But the abuse didn't stop there. He repeatedly pushed himself on her in the days that followed, kept coming back, asking for more. Eventually, she gave in — not out of con-

sent, but as a way to survive and try to brush him off. “I thought maybe if I agreed, he'd stop. But it just never ended. It became a normal thing,” she said, her voice breaking.

In tears, she recalled how he later admitted he ran a prostitution business and asked if she was interested in joining. “Because I hadn't met the others when I arrived, I never told anyone. But as days went by, another woman confided in me that he was also sleeping with her,” she said. “We kept quiet about it until we decided to escape.”



AI generated image of an unhappy worker, fearing her boss

For a month, 'Masechaba worked silently, enduring trauma and confusion. Eventually, she asked the boss to let her Lesotho before the 30 days were up to stay within the then legal limit allowed by immigration.

As she planned her escape, she opened up to the lady she arrived with, only to discover that the same man had tried the same thing with her friend back in 2015. That friend had managed to flee on her second day.

Before leaving, 'Masechaba convinced another woman to escape with her. On payday, they were handed meager wages — just M1,100 after deductions. When they tried to leave, the security guard at the gate refused to open for them. “We had to jump the walls to escape,” she said.

After their escape, they made their way to Beautiful Dream Society, an organisation that assists victims of human trafficking. That's when 'Masechaba began to unpack her trauma. Her mother, who had been in Lesotho, said she had been excited her daughter found work, only to be shocked by what unfolded. “She never stopped crying when she got home,” her mother said. “She just wanted to support her 9-year-old child, not be enslaved.”

## Patterns of Exploitation

'Masechaba's story is not isolated. Khune Village keeps coming up. Weekly Observer investigating the place, found it referred to where “the real things happen” in as far as sex trafficking is concerned.

Investigations reveal a darker his-

tory. On 15 January 2018, Daily Dispatch published an exposé titled “Inside Free State Farm Suspected Human Trafficking Lair”. The article revealed that 10 people — from Lesotho and South Africa — were rescued from a farm just outside of Welkom. Six suspects were arrested.

The article described a chilling scene: a farm with a sign reading “Livestock for sale”, but inside, boxes of condoms, a receipt book, and detailed records of transactions:

22/12/17. Alice. 1 hour. 6:5 out 7:5. Room 6. R120.

25/12/17. 2 hours. 5:15 out 7:15. Room 9. R240.

01/01/18. 1 hour. 6:30 out 7:30. Room 13. R250.

The publication reveals that Authorities at the time stated the farm as : “one of the province's most infamous human trafficking syndicates. Its purpose: the alleged trade of young women from across southern Africa.”

A cleaner interviewed in the article confirmed this, saying: “There are all kinds of girls. Basotho, South Africans. They are guarded. You can buy a girl like you buy alcohol.” He recounted seeing three girls from Lesotho the previous year — one still in school uniform — claiming they had come “to clear weeds.”

He ended with a stark warning: “Go to town and you will find out more information. Everyone knows.”

“Go to town and you will find out more information. Everyone knows.”

'Masechaba had indicated that the owner runs multiple establishments, guest houses, farms, car wash, plac-

ing his workers at whichever outlet he chooses. “During the day, it's work. In the evening, it's sex.”

Sources based in Welkom confirmed that Khune Village is notorious for prostitution, and has been operating for many years. The resident said, “Everyone knows what's happening there. The owner is very much feared.”

The same source added that Welkom has a reputation for “brown envelopes” — a term commonly used to refer to bribes and backdoor dealings. This indicates possibilities of how the place continues to operate the way it does.

In April this year, a social media post made ‘anonymously’ warned about the place. The post exposed an image of a woman allegedly recruiting on the owner's behalf sparked a wave of responses from the victims, survivors, and those who know about the place. Some spoke of similar experiences. Others shared warnings.

A WhatsApp group has even been created by those who once worked at the guest houses — a silent network of survivors seeking healing and justice.

But while stories surface, fear still reigns. Many remain quiet, too scared to step forward. Others might simply be unaware that what they've endured constitutes trafficking — a crime hidden under the guise of employment.

Speaking to the Free State Provincial Spokesperson of the South African Police Service (SAPS) yesterday, it was confirmed that Khune Village is a licensed liquor establishment in Welkom.

It remains unclear whether the ‘guesthouses’ mentioned by sources are legally operating.

Brigadier Motantsi Makhele stated that over the past two years, two rape cases linked to the area were investigated by the HAWKS.

“According to our records, those cases were finalised in court,” he said.

He further noted that due to high police visibility and regular patrols, there have been no recent reports or ongoing investigations related to the liquor establishment at Welkom SAPS.

However, Weekly Observer was unable to confirm whether any action has been taken against the owner of the establishment, as implicated in past HAWKS investigations.

As more voices like 'Masechaba's come forward, so does the urgent need for accountability and protection. Civil society, law enforcement, and regional organisations must take decisive action.

Places like Khune Village and the farm are not just names on a map — they are alleged scenes of silent suffering. Unless exposed and confronted, more lives risk being destroyed behind closed guesthouse doors.

It is equally vital that survivors and witnesses are encouraged to report cases of abuse. Speaking up is the first step to breaking the cycle.



## TS'EPISO SERABELE

Maseru

Tšepo grew up with a deep love for soccer. On dusty village grounds and in local leagues, he chased his dream of becoming a professional athlete — a dream that would eventually be used to trap him in one of the most deceptive forms of human trafficking.

In 2021, while playing for a B division team in Lesotho, Tšepo became close to a group of Nigerian teammates. One of them, whom we will refer to in this publication as Oga — a Nigerian slang term for “boss” — introduced him to what seemed like a life-changing opportunity: a football trial in Dubai. He was promised that if the trial failed, he would return home with M25,000.

“At the time, I wasn’t doing well where I worked,” Tšepo recalls. “So I told myself, at least I’ll come back with something if the trial doesn’t go well.”

The offer came through someone they referred to as the Agent, whom Oga claimed was his brother based in Dubai. Together, they took care of Tšepo’s documents, visa, and plane tickets. In October 2021, his travel began — first to South Africa for a COVID-19 certificate, then quarantine in Nairobi, Kenya, before finally landing in Dubai in early November.

That’s when everything changed.

“From the airport, I was picked up by people who told me I’d stay with them because the Agent was too busy. A week later, I finally met the Agent. That’s when I found out I wasn’t there for football at all.”

The Agent made it clear that Tšepo was in Dubai not for trials, but to open multiple bank accounts under his name using his legal documents. The accounts, he was told, would be used for the traffickers good, but not his own. He had first been told the Agent is quite busy, therefore, he would need to take care of himself, hence the need for an account. But unfortunately, this was not the case.

“I told him I came for football, not for this. He said the card was not mine, and if I refused, then I’d have to find my own way back home, which could take days or even weeks,” said Tšepo. “They asked who would pay for all that lengthy process, and where I’d live.”

Oga, contacted by phone from Lesotho, denied any knowledge of the scheme and passed blame onto someone in South Africa. But shortly afterward, he called again and told Tšepo; “Do whatever they ask you to do so you can come back home safely.”

Feeling trapped and with no support, Tšepo reluctantly agreed.

He was instructed to apply for a local ID, obtain police clearance, register seven bank accounts, five SIM cards, and create an email address, which he will use to apply for bank accounts online. His documents, including passport and visa, had always remained with the traffickers. Some bank accounts were opened in person, others online, and one account opened without his knowledge. He was even told to memorise one phone number which he will use to apply for accounts.

“I was given a phone to use when entering the bank, and they took it right back as I came out. That’s when I noticed

# Trafficked Through Football: How a Promising Player’s Dream Turned Into a Nightmare



huge sums of money moving in and out of these accounts rapidly,” he said.

The scheme grew darker. He was made to buy an iPhone using credit, told to say the rest of the money would be paid later. One of the IDs labeled him as the administrative officer for a fictitious project . Then, he was told to rent an apartment.

“They came with a woman I didn’t know. I was told she’s my wife. I had to sign a marriage certificate. I didn’t even get the chance to speak to her properly, but she looked scared too.”

He was handed a checkbook, a phone, and instructions on how to sign them. A man helping them rent the flat later pulled Tšepo aside and asked for the

truth.

“I told him everything. He said if I had gotten that flat, the traffickers would have used it to track me and control the bills globally. He said the Nigerians use people’s names to live rent-free and run their operations.”

Fortunately, the apartment deal fell through because the man assisting made some story that Tšepo hadn’t stayed in Dubai for more than six months, there, his boss refuses to give out a flat.

The Agent quickly arranged for a new COVID certificate and bought him a return ticket. Within 24 hours, Tšepo was back on a flight. But the M25,000 he was promised? He received only R3,000 —

and had to use it to travel straight home before the COVID certificate expired.

Back in Lesotho, Oga refused to pay the remaining balance. Tšepo opened a case against him. The court found Oga guilty and sentenced him to 15 years in prison — suspending five years. After serving ten, he will be deported to his home country as an illegal immigrant.

“I’m happy with the verdict,” Tšepo says. “It means I won’t have to see him again — even after his release.”

However, the fallout continued.

Authorities in Dubai flagged Tšepo’s name due to suspicious money movements in the accounts registered under his name. To make things worse, a Nigerian man was arrested in Dubai using Tšepo’s identity. He was forced to undergo fingerprinting at a local police station in Lesotho to prove his innocence and send verification to Dubai.

“I still live in fear,” he admits. “Anything they did under my name might come back again.”

He now wants young athletes and job seekers to learn from his ordeal.

“Traffickers take advantage of people’s needs,” he warns. “Always verify before you leave the country. I loved football with all my heart. But they beat me using the very thing I loved. That’s why I’ve lost interest completely.”

## Understanding and Guarding Against Identify Theft in the Age of Human Trafficking

**ZANELE SELEBALO** | Cybersecurity Analyst

In today’s connected world, identity theft has become one of the most dangerous forms of cybercrime and unfortunately, it is often entangled with human trafficking and exploitation.

### 1. What is identity theft?

Identity theft occurs when someone fraudulently uses another person’s personal information such as names, ID/passport numbers, banking details, or even biometric data without their knowledge or consent, usually for financial gain or criminal purposes.

In the context of trafficking, identity theft can be used to move money, create fake travel records, or even register someone in foreign employment schemes while they are unaware, as was the case with the victim whose name was used in Dubai while they were physically in Lesotho.

### 2. How to Avoid Identity Theft\*

While no one is ever entirely immune, here are some steps everyone can take to reduce the risk:

. Protect your personal documents – Don’t share ID copies, passports, or banking details unnecessarily, and always verify the identity of those requesting them.

.Be cautious online – Avoid clicking on suspicious links or giving personal info on unverified platforms.

Secure your devices – Use strong passwords and enable two-factor authentication on important accounts.

Monitor your accounts – Regularly check your bank statements and online profiles for unusual activity.

Report lost/stolen documents immediately – This can prevent criminals from using them fraudulently.

### \*3. Recovering from Identity Theft\*

If you suspect or discover your identity has been stolen:

Report it immediately to the police, your bank, and your country’s data protection or cybersecurity agency.

Request a credit report to check for unauthorized financial activity.

Change all passwords and secure your devices.

Consult with a cybersecurity or legal expert to help you reclaim your identity and clear your name in any fraudulent records.

Human trafficking is not just physical it’s digital too. Exploiters increasingly use technology to manipulate, exploit, and erase people’s agency. By being informed, vigilant, and proactive, we can protect ourselves and each other from the devastating consequences of identity theft.

# When Trust Turns Deadly: Even Church Women Can Be Human Traffickers

TS’EPISO SERABELE  
BUTHA BUTHE

Being a mother at 23, all Lisebo ever wanted was to build a better future for her children. With the full support of her husband’s family—free from the tension many brides face with in-laws—she sold hotdogs and other street food in Botha-Bothe to help support her household.

But in March 2024, as a 27 year old, everything changed.

Her mother-in-law introduced her to a job opportunity in Johannesburg, said to be arranged by a trusted community figure: the teacher of Lisebo’s children, a woman they also went to church with. According to the teacher, there was a vacancy for someone to sell grain-based food in Joburg, with a promised salary of M4,500 per month. It sounded like a breakthrough.

Encouraged by the opportunity, Lisebo agreed to go. Soon, she was asked to send a photograph to the “employer” to prove she was young and strong enough for the

work. Her first photo—taken at her wedding next to her husband—was rejected. She was told to send one of herself alone. Wanting to impress, she changed into a traditional Seshoeshoe dress and obliged.

“On the breezy morning of April 7th, 2024, wrapped in my fleece, jacket, and ready bag, I left. I was excited to work and provide for my kids. I had no phone—so I bought airtime to help the Joburg taxi driver contact the woman who would pick me up,” she recalls.

Upon arrival in Johannesburg, Lisebo was met by the woman. When she asked about her new employer, she was simply told, “Don’t worry, you’ll be fine.” That was the first red flag.

They got into another taxi, under the pretense of collecting a key before proceeding to meet the employer. While in transit, Lisebo used the woman’s phone to text her family and confirm she had arrived safely.

“Something told me to snoop through the WhatsApp chats between the woman and the teacher. Most of it was voice

notes. But then I saw a picture of a man... I assumed it was her boyfriend and dismissed it.”

Their next stop was at a small mall near a garage, followed by a taxi ride to an informal settlement that resembled a squatter camp. Korianana music played loudly in the background. The place felt unsafe, unfamiliar, and far from the promise of a legitimate job.

“I asked the woman if this was where she lived. The house inside was disturbing—full of weapons. I was scared.”

Moments later, a man entered.

“Khaitsele, thepa ea hau eke u tliselit-seng eona e sele teng,” the woman said—“Brother, here is the package you were waiting for.”

The man responded with chilling satisfaction:

“Kea bona u khethile hantle. Ke eona e neng ke batla—eane e fotong.”

(I see you chose well. She’s the one I wanted—the one from the photo.)

That’s when it dawned on Lisebo: she had been trafficked.

The woman then inquired about her remaining payment, suggesting she had already received some money and groceries earlier that morning. Two more men were summoned to see Lisebo.

“One of them said he was going to sleep with me. When I refused, the other said not to worry—I’d become ‘softer’ with time. I was furious, but I had to act brave. Fighting back would only make things worse.”

Lisebo had hidden her passport in her clothing and claimed not to have one, having crossed illegally’, hoping to avoid further exploitation.

As the man grew increasingly drunk, she noticed his phone left beside her. Remembering his pattern, she unlocked it and sent messages to her parents, telling them she had been trafficked and had stolen the phone. She confirmed

the man’s identity using his WhatsApp profile photo—then quickly deleted the evidence.

“They tried to feed me, gave me a cold can of Stoney. I poured it on my fleece. They thought I had fallen asleep, but I was plotting my escape.”

Later, an older woman in the area noticed Lisebo and asked why someone her age was in such a place. Lisebo explained her ordeal, and the woman hid her for the night.

The next morning, the man knocked at the woman’s house, now sober, claiming he wasn’t kidnapping her—insisting the woman had agreed to bring him a “wife” from Lesotho. He handed over M150 for transport, which wasn’t enough.

Lisebo walked to the nearby garage where she had first arrived. There, she told her story to a manager who assisted her in calling the police. She was soon in a police van, listening to the voice notes exchanged between the trafficker and the teacher—evidence now in the hands of law enforcement.

Her parents arranged transport to bring her back home to Lesotho. But the journey of healing was far from over.

“I was angry. I hated my kid’s teacher. I wanted to burn her house down. I couldn’t talk about what had happened. Therapy was suggested, but it didn’t help—I didn’t feel human anymore.”

Trauma began to manifest in destructive ways. She developed a gambling addiction, playing lucky numbers obsessively.

“I’d leave home pretending to sell, but always came back empty-handed. Gambling made me feel in control, like I was healing—but it wasn’t real healing.”

She documented her pain in a private journal filled with dark images and symbols. Every day, she would stab the drawings with matchsticks or knives. Anti-depressants were prescribed but quickly discarded—she believed they were “for mad people.”

She hid her habits from her family.

Eventually, a call came from a support group, Beautiful Dream Society, offering to meet with her. Though fearful and full of trust issues, she agreed to attend sessions.

“I didn’t think I’d ever open up about my life. But after two months, I started feeling human again.”

The group enrolled her in a two-year course. Slowly, she began to find herself.

“I was ashamed to open up to my family, but when I did, they never turned their backs on me. We had real, hard conversations—and it gave us a new beginning.”

Today, Lisebo is still healing. But her story is a chilling reminder: human trafficking knows no boundaries—age, gender, status, or even religion. It can come cloaked in trust, wrapped in community, and disguised in faith.

Let this be a warning to all: even the people we revere can be traffickers. And the fight against trafficking must start with education, awareness, and vigilance.



## Network of Early Childhood Development of Lesotho (NECDOL)’s stance on human trafficking in Lesotho —from a child protection lens

SHOESHOE MOFOKENG- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NECDOL

For the holistic wellbeing of a child, they need a safe, nurturing environment. Free from trauma, abuse, and the threat of trafficking, whether experienced by them or passed down through pain of their parents.

**Missing Children Reports Are Rising — What Can Parents & Communities Do?**

Recent increases in reports of missing minors have sparked serious concern across communities. These cases are a wake-up call for parents and caregivers to remain

alert and actively involved in their children’s lives. For some, it’s hard to believe that children are trafficked—until it hits close to home.

**What Parents & Communities Should Know:**

- Know your child’s friends and where they live.
- Rebuild strong community ties when neighbors know each other, it’s easier to spot danger.
- Teach children about trafficking.
- Be alert to changes in behavior or routine that may signal danger.

**Sexual Exploitation and Local Trafficking**

These critical issues must be confronted!

There is a troubling rise in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation. Many believe the government response has been inadequate.

**What is Needed:**

- Harsher sentencing — with a minimum of 10 years for sexual abusers.
- No bail for offenders in exploitation-related cases.

**Every child deserves safety!**



# From Promised Jobs to Hidden Hell: ‘Malineo’s Ordeal in Newcastle TIP Trap

**TS’EPIISO SERABELE**

Maseru

When Malineo (not her real names) lost her job at a factory in mid-2022, she, like many others in Lesotho, was desperate for work. A better-paying opportunity came knocking — or so it seemed — from a man recruiting for a textile firm in Newcastle, South Africa. The promise? Decent pay, free meals, and accommodation, with minor deductions. The reality? A brutal journey into modern-day slavery.

After months without income, Malineo considered the offer. She was hesitant at first, asking questions for days before signing up. Her husband, cautious and suspicious, warned that crossing into South Africa for work without full information and at least some funds to survive was risky. Still, desperate for income, he reluctantly let her go.

Like many before them, they crossed the border illegally with the help of “li-rurubele” — known smugglers who co-ordinate with ‘rogue officials’. For M50 each, they were assisted by a woman posing as a police officer.

Arriving at 3a.m. in Newcastle, the group of 22 was asked to surrender their identification documents. What awaited them wasn’t opportunity — but exploitation.

“There were rats. We stood on chairs. People slept under tables near toilets,” recalls Malineo. The factory itself had just two functioning lines.

At one factory, they had been denied entry, allegedly because “Basotho had killed a Chinese employer.”

They were left to fend for themselves.

The Hunger, the Stench, the Silence, and smell.

“There was no food. No water. No mattresses,” Malineo remembers. Days went by without a proper bath. At night, people worked instead of sleeping. “We squeezed under tables. Used jackets and fleece blankets as bedding.”

Only on the third day did the women pool together to buy two loaves of bread to share. Even those on lifelong medication struggled to survive.

When Malineo confronted the recruiter after days without work, she was dismissed. Eventually, she was handed an unfamiliar machine and expected to iron garments by hand — paid just little over 20 lisente for an item.

She wasn’t allowed to leave. IDs were withheld.

Women began turning to prostitution. Others drank excessively to cope. “The toilet was right next to where we cooked,” she says. “The smell was unbearable.”

Eventually, Malineo’s health failed. The first hospital turned her away for being Mosotho. A second hospital admitted her — but only after she had



partially lost feeling on the left side of her head. Discharged without a home, she slept at the hospital.

The recruiter demanded M350 for her release — a fee for transport. Fellow workers scraped together the money. A sibling in Lesotho also sent M1,000 to help her get home.

Crossing back into Lesotho with a hospital referral letter, Malineo reported her story to local police, who referred her to the BDS (Beautiful Dreams Society). She was later hospitalised in Mafeteng, where her sick child had also been admitted.

“I feared seeing my husband,” she admits. “But he understood. My child was in Form E. I had to get up again.”

## Healing Through Helping Hands

The BDS referred her to World Vision Lesotho, which provided her with a sewing machine. With skills she already had, Malineo started her own business.

“Life has changed. I no longer want to be employed. But running a business has its own challenges.”

The recruiter, a Mosotho man (sometimes called “Lucky”, known only by aliases, frequently changes her phone numbers. She remains at large.

Malineo’s case is not unique. Human trafficking through “recreation of employment” continues to thrive, preying on Basotho desperate for survival. Newcastle has become a notorious zone for

this modern-day slavery, hiding in plain sight under the name of textile work.

Speaking to Weekly Observer, Thato Massa from World Vision Lesotho explained that through the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Project, funded by the European Union, the organisation supports victims of human trafficking by helping them rebuild their lives.

“We currently have 24 participants enrolled in income-generating activities,” Massa revealed. He added that the programme provides start-up materials and support for small businesses, tailored to each survivor’s skills and aspirations.

“The goal is to reduce poverty — the root cause that makes many vulnerable to trafficking in the first place,” he said.

With Lesotho facing one of the highest unemployment rates in the region, and uncertainty looming over international trade agreements like the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) — which provides tariff-free access for textile exports — many Basotho are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation. Desperation should never lead to silence.

What happened to Malineo is a painful reminder that not every job offer is an opportunity. Some are traps. Scams posing as employment are growing more sophisticated, and without proper safeguards, more lives will be shattered.

## Safeguarding Athletes: LSRC on Preventing of TIP in Sports

### PULE RANTS’ELI- Information Officer at LSRC

The Lesotho Sport and Recreation Commission (LSRC), together with sports associations like the Lesotho Football Association and Lesotho Lawn Tennis Association, outlines their efforts in protecting athletes from exploitation.

#### 1. International Collaboration

Governing bodies such as FIFA and the International Tennis Federation play a key role in overseeing athlete recruitment, ensuring rights are protected and regulations are followed.

#### 2. Pre-Departure Procedures

Before athletes are sent abroad:

- Contracts are thoroughly reviewed
- Recruiters and agents undergo background checks
- Athletes’ documents are verified
- Compliance with national and international laws is ensured

#### 3. Athlete Monitoring

Athlete movements and contracts are monitored through systems like FIFA’s transfer tracking to ensure transparency and protection.

#### 4. The Link Between Sports & Human Trafficking

While formal systems are in place, informal recruitment channels remain a threat. Unsuspecting youth can be lured into exploitation. LSRC confirms cases of attempted trafficking of children as young as 12, reinforcing the need for continued vigilance.

LSRC remains committed to working with stakeholders to protect young athletes, ensuring sports remain a safe space for growth and opportunity.

# MEDIA ETHICS & SENSITIVITY IN REPORTING ON TIP

•••with Nicole Tau| Acting National Director,  
MISA Lesotho

## Balancing Public Interest Vs Privacy

The core purpose of journalism is to serve the public and promote transparency. There’s a reason it is often called the ‘Fourth Estate’—the term acknowledges the media’s vital role as a watchdog and a check on power, alongside the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. This means the media is a powerful tool that must be wielded with immense responsibility and for the greater good.

This responsibility is the foundation of public trust. How can people trust us if we use their information in a way that feels exploitative? To find the balance you’re asking about, we must prioritize the principle of “do no harm.” The story can be both truthful and impactful without revealing details that could endanger or re-traumatize a source. It’s all about skillful delivery. A journalist’s creativity isn’t just in writing a catchy headline; it’s in framing a story to expose a systemic issue without sacrificing an individual’s safety and dignity.

## Protecting Identity

The safety and dignity of your sources must always come first. This starts with a direct conversation: Are they comfortable revealing their private information? But it doesn’t end there. Sometimes, sources may not be fully aware of the long-term consequences of being publicly identified.

It is our ethical duty as journalists to inform them of these risks. After that, we must ask ourselves a critical question: “Is this specific detail essential for the public to understand the story, or does it merely satisfy curiosity?” In almost every case, a story about trafficking, for instance, is strengthened, not weakened, by protecting a survivor’s identity, because it allows the larger issue to be brought to light safely.

## Informed Consent

Consent is non-negotiable.. it is the absolute bedrock of ethical journalism. We must move beyond seeing it as a simple “yes.” We should be seeking informed consent, which means ensuring the person understands the angle of the story, where it will be published, and the potential impact it could have on their life.

## Recording Interviews Ethically

Ethically and, in many places, legally, you must always inform your subject that you are recording. This is where we must be aware of relevant laws... Consult a legal professional.. But either way, transparency is key to trust. Even if you are pursuing an investigative story, you must be familiar with the law in your jurisdiction regarding recording consent.

When you ask for permission, you can reassure the source that the recording is for accuracy and reference only and will be stored securely and confidentially. You must then honor that promise. If you break that trust, you damage your credibility and potentially the credibility of the profession. Secure storage means using encrypted files and deleting the recordings once they are no longer necessary for an active story, in line with data protection principles.

## Interviewing traumatised victims

This is a specialized skill. I believe all journalists, regardless of experience, need ongoing training in trauma-informed interviewing. The primary principle is to prevent re-traumatization. We are there to hear a story, not to extract “juicy parts” at the expense of someone’s well-being.

This involves giving the source control over the interview-letting them pause, skip questions, and decide what to share. It means using open-ended, non-judgmental language and being attuned to their emotional and physical state. Our job is to create a safe space for them to share their truth, not to push them past their limits for the sake of a quote. The well-being and dignity of our sources must always come first.

## Safety and Confidentiality (protection of victims e.g provision of safe houses?)

A journalist is not a social worker, a law enforcement officer, or a protection agent, therefore boundaries are important. As journalists, our primary function is to report. Attempting to personally provide security can create complex ethical dilemmas and may even put the source in greater danger if not handled professionally.

The responsible approach is collaboration. As journalists, we should build strong networks with NGOs, victim support organizations, and relevant authorities who are equipped to provide this specialized assistance. Our role is to make the connection, to refer the victim to those who can help. It’s a vital part of our job to know who those support systems are before we find ourselves in a crisis situation.

## Photojournalism Ethics

Consent Photography in these contexts must be guided by the same principles: dignity, respect, and privacy. You have to approach every scene with deep consideration for the individuals involved. The goal is to convey the gravity of the story without exploiting the subject’s vulnerability.

This can be done creatively. Instead of a revealing portrait, perhaps the story is better told through a photo of their hands, a silhouette, or an object that represents their experience. The camera should tell the truth, but it should never steal a person’s dignity.

## When Stories Are Incomplete or Inconsistent

This is where the foundational skills of journalism are most crucial. First, a skilled interview is not an interrogation. It’s a process of empathetic listening that helps the source recall events accurately. Second, and most importantly, is verification. Our job is to corroborate the key facts of the story through independent research, documents, or other sources.

If you find discrepancies, it doesn’t automatically mean the source is lying. Trauma can fragment memory. The correct approach is to report what you can verify as fact and to attribute the unverified elements directly to the source. Using phrases like “she claims,” “he alleges,” or “according to her account” are not signs of condescension... they are tools of journalistic precision. They allow you to tell someone’s truth without presenting it as absolute, verified fact.

## Maintaining Neutrality & Empathy

Maintaining professionalism is essential. However, professionalism does not mean being cold or robotic. We are dealing with human beings, and strong interpersonal skills are critical. The goal should be empathy, not necessarily sympathy. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another, which helps you ask better questions and listen more effectively. Sympathy can sometimes lead to losing the objectivity needed to tell the story fairly.

It’s about creating a safe, non-judgmental space where the source feels heard. Of course, we are human, and I’ve certainly shared a tear or two during an interview. The key is to ensure our own emotions don’t overshadow the source’s narrative or compromise our professional duty to report accurately and ethically.



# “Slay Queen” Culture & Trafficking Risks

## ...with BARALI FOUNDATION

### Q: How can the «slay queen»lifestyle expose young women to trafficking and exploitation?

We have to understand that being a slay queen is not a bad thing, especially if you have the means to “slay”. If, as a woman, you work hard or earn a good salary or have a reputable business you run and you can take care of yourself, then “slaying” is not a problem. The problem comes when one is being lured or tricked by people into becoming a slay queen to match a certain standard of living, and because most often it gets difficult to maintain that standard, young girls often fall victim to men with money. This can be one of the forms of human trafficking because those men lure these girls to locations far away from their homes and can either harm them or make them do things they do not agree with.

### Q: Does society glamorise risky lifestyles under the illusion of success or independence?

Society does play a role in shaping the thoughts and decisions people make. I mean, if you are surrounded by women or girls who glamourise being a slay queen as an indicator of success, your realm of thoughts automatically aligns with that belief. So, because of that, young girls then feel the pressure to prove themselves as successful or independent individuals by being a slay queen, but sadly enough, not many of them can afford to maintain that lifestyle, and they then engage in risky behaviour in order to gain money to afford their lifestyle.

### Q: How do influencers and online content influence unsafe behaviours?

Influencers and content creators use social media for different reasons. Some for marketing purposes, some for engagement purposes, and some for business purposes, and many others.. The truth behind this is, the fancy cars, clothes, and the fancy lifestyles we see on social media don’t always reflect the reality of their lives. So many young girls and boys tend to idolise these influencers by wanting to live like them, therefore putting pressure on themselves to live like their role models. This practice easily makes them fall victim to human trafficking, especially if they are promised the same kind of lifestyle by anyone with a lot of money.

### Q: Have you seen cases where transactional relationships turned into exploitation?

Most often, these human traffickers promise their victims money or buy them whatever they need, but in return, they sometimes force them to do things they do not want. Let us understand that human trafficking is not only about being abducted or kidnapped, it can also be about being controlled and monitored, and not being allowed to do what you want to do, and constantly getting threats. So these traffickers trick these young girls with sweet promises, but without realising that there is a price to pay for those sweet promises.

### Q: How can families talk to young women about lifestyle choices without shaming them?

Honesty should always be the best policy. In fact, honesty should be the only policy. If parents and communities don’t talk about the consequences of choosing a certain lifestyle, then our young people are doomed. We live in an era where information is at the tip of our fingers and anyone can access information, so if we keep the real information from them, they will still get access to that same information, but this time it may be false information, and false information may mislead them into making wrong decisions. So our honest suggestion is to let them know from a young age about the dangers of certain lifestyles. It shouldn’t be about shaming them but rather helping them make the right choices.

### Q: Could «slay queening» be a survival strategy?If so, how can we address the root causes?

It is sad to say, but yes, it is used as a survival mechanism. We have a youth unemployment crisis in Lesotho, and most young people try anything possible to make a living, including the act of being a slay queen, where they get huge amounts of money from their “masters”. So sometimes it is the only way out of poverty for some people. It is our belief at Barali Foundation that if we are able to empower the youth through informal education, this will foster self-reliance and help build communities through sustainable development strategies. That is our mission as the Barali Foundation.

### Q: What safe alternatives or empowerment options exist for at-risk young women?

We need to teach our young girls the importance of valuing themselves and appreciating themselves for who they are. We need to teach them that they do not need anyone or society’s approval to feel beautiful or appreciated. We need to foster resilience skills in them for hard times. All these informal education starts from home and in our communities. When young girls feel empowered in their communities, it makes it hard for them to be lured or tricked by anyone and end up being victims of human trafficking.

### Q: How do social media platforms contribute to grooming or recruitment?

Many young people, especially girls, want to be seen as beautiful, successful, or desirable online. They post pictures, follow trends, and wait for likes, comments, or followers. When they do not get attention, they may feel like they are not good enough. When they do get attention, especially from strangers, they then start to feel special or wanted. That emotional need for attention becomes a door for someone with bad intentions to walk through. Groomers often look for young people who frequently post selfies or personal content. They will comment with things like “You are so beautiful” or “You should be a model.” Slowly, they build a fake relationship by making the person feel good about themselves. They gain their trust, and once the victim feels close to them, they begin asking for more, maybe private photos, maybe a meeting in person.

### Q: What preventative tips can help protect youth women and their communities?

We should build Confidence and Self-Worth in our young girls. Traffickers often target girls who are unsure of themselves or crave approval. We should use programs and mentorship that build self-esteem and body confidence, as well as celebrate achievements that are not based on looks or popularity. Lastly, we should encourage girls to find value in their skills, talents, and minds.

We also need to strengthen families and communities. Sometimes trafficking happens because there is poverty, abuse, or a lack of support at home. We should help parents understand how online grooming works. We should teach each family how to talk openly about difficult topics like sex, relationships, and consent. We should teach about healthy and unhealthy relationships. Many traffickers pretend to be boyfriends or caring adults. Moreover, we should teach girls the difference between real love and control or manipulation.

### Q: What is Barali Foundation? And how does it provide support?

We are a Civil Society Organisation whose mission is to empower rural youth in Lesotho, particularly herd boys and girl dropouts, through innovative programs focused on technology, agriculture, life skills, financial literacy, and health among other things.

We are dedicated at fostering self-reliance and contributing to sustainable community development.

Contact Details: +266 5979 0176