



**HUMAN TRAFFICKING WORKING GROUP**

Dr Andreas Schloenhardt (Coordinator)

The University of Queensland  
TC Beirne School of Law

The University of British Columbia  
Centre of International Relations

[www.law.uq.edu.au/humantrafficking](http://www.law.uq.edu.au/humantrafficking)

**NEWS REPORT**

<b>Headline</b>	<b>Fat 'bully' loses to Thai bride used as servant</b>
<b>Reported in</b>	<i>The Australian</i>
<b>Date of publication</b>	May 23, 2009
<b>Place of publication</b>	Sydney
<b>Author</b>	Caroline Overington
<b>Page</b>	3
<b>Copyright</b>	© 2009 News Limited

A Tasmanian man who went to Thailand to find a sixth wife and put her into domestic servitude has lost three-quarters of his assets, including his house and his business, in a Family Court case.

The court heard that the man, who was born in 1945 and at one point was so obese he could hardly leave his bed, had forced his young bride into hard physical labour throughout the 10-year marriage. He had been married five times before he travelled to Thailand in 1997 to find her. She was 25 years his junior, and spoke no English.

The man told the court the woman had been working as a prostitute in Thailand and he saved her from that life. She denied it, saying she worked in a factory. In any case, he brought her to Australia soon after they met and set her to work in his market garden outside Hobart, where she toiled for \$40 a month. She was also asked to carry out what the judge described as “disgusting” tasks, related to the man's physical care. In the course of the marriage, the woman gave birth to four of the man's children.

The Family Court, sitting in Hobart in April, heard that the husband grew fatter and more sedentary, and had taken to sitting on a stool, waving a large stick and shouting orders at the woman and their children. When she left him, he sought custody of the children, and most of the assets, saying all had belonged to him before the marriage.

Her victory in the court has been hailed by female lawyers and domestic violence support workers as a sign that men should not think they can travel to poor countries and find brides to work as domestic servants. The judge said the husband was “a huge man, some five foot eight in height, but weighed at his worst, something near 200kg”. “His enormous weight caused him to be gravely disabled and that he was able to get around only with difficulty,” the judge said.

The wife and two of the children told the court that the husband “tended to lie around in bed; that he tended to play with the computer, and called upon every member of the family to look to his various wants, which included bathing him, dressing him, cleaning up his toiletry and applying ointment to bleeding buttocks”.

“The father in effect was nothing else but a bully,” the judge said. “He demanded that his wants be attended to before anybody else's. He adopted an authoritarian manner whereby he sat on his stool and waved a large stick at them, demanding that they do certain things in relation to the gardening. He insisted that (his wife) carry out physical labouring tasks as well as looking after his more private needs, notwithstanding that she had had a bad caesarean and was in considerable pain.”

The husband told the court he was the victim of domestic violence, and that his wife had once tried to kill him with a meat cleaver. The judge found to the contrary, saying she “worked exceptionally hard”.

The value of the couple's property was put at \$200,000, the total of which was “put in by the father (because) the mother had nothing”. But the judge said she had done an “enormous amount of work” in the house and the market garden, and awarded her 75 per cent of the assets.

National Council of Women president Margaret Smith hailed the decision as “one of the very good decisions of the Family Court”. “We mostly hear of cases where men tell their wives they have no rights, they will lose their children, so this should be a signpost to women who find themselves trapped like this, to know there is a way out,” Ms Smith said.

An electronic copy of this document is available at [www.law.uq.edu.au/humantrafficking](http://www.law.uq.edu.au/humantrafficking).