

An Initial Exploration of Young Males in the Male-to-Male Massage Industry in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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Research performed in Southeast Asia with those working in the sex industry or those suffering from sexual exploitation have most often focused on girls and young women. This study focuses on the young men working in the male-to-male sex industry in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. It serves as an initial exploration of some the vulnerabilities and potential resiliencies of these young men from their own perspective in order to better understand them. Surveys were conducted with 45 young men from six male-to-male massage parlors. Vulnerabilities were assessed including financial security, sexual history and health, violence and potential resilience, including faith and future plans. This information was collected to determine needs these young men may have and provide initial data as a basis for future research.

THIS STUDY IS ONE OF THE FEW ATTEMPTS OF ANY RESEARCH TO TRY TO understand the situation for young males in the sex industry in Cambodia. Massage parlors for men are the most visible places that young men are involved in commercial sexual exploitation and most accessible to research, but a recent surge in night-clubs, gay bars and internet chat rooms where young Cambodian men can be “picked up” for paid sex indicate that massage places may be only the “tip of the iceberg.” Many Christian organizations have been actively working with sexually exploited girls (50 faith-based abolitionist partners are part of the Chab Dai network (www.chabdai.org)) and many describe their work as working with ‘children’ suggesting both genders, but only four partners are doing anything to specifically address the issue of young males involved in the sexual exploitation trade. Some organizations that are working with street children have become aware that some boys are sexually exploited but have not considered how to address it.

Prior to this study, no Christian organizations appeared to acknowledge that male-to-male “massage” existed in Cambodia, despite open advertising to tourists. Programming of secular organizations appears to see sexually exploited males only as vectors of HIV. As Christians we have a responsibility to provide holistic care to this population in a Hindu-Buddhist context where they are looked down on by many who believe them to have no value or hope.

NGOs are dependent on funding by donors. Thus, we believe that the lack of programming addressing the needs of sexually exploited males may be attributed partly to a Western world-view held by donors where the female is vulnerable and needs rescuing (cf. *Sleeping beauty*), while the male is resilient and does not (cf. *Aladdin*). In addition there may be reluctance to engage with a population that are considered to be “gay,” too closely linked to the controversial debates in Christian circles, even though many of the young men do not self identify as gay and the concern is more about commercial sexual exploitation. Thirdly, working with males has very different challenges than working with females and some organizations may not feel adequately prepared/trained or not yet ready to take up these challenges.

However, in the past two years there has been a move principally by Christians towards assisting boys and young men. The Hard Places Community is a Christian organization that works in two communities with young boys who have been sexually exploited and provides a daycare center for them. This study was conducted by staff from this organization, with technical support from Love146, a Christian non-government organization working to combat sexual exploitation of children.

The young males who participated in this survey said that they were all over the age of 18 years. However, it is possible that some of the respondents were told by their employers not to provide their actual age, knowing the concerns of some regarding prostituted people under 18 years of age and how this might lead to “interference” by NGOs. There is an implicit belief among some clients that once a person becomes an adult that they are no longer victims or vulnerable but able to make their own choices. However, in a context where “choices” are so limited this may not be as clear-cut as imagined. Even where young men say they have chosen to do this, they may have been attracted to the initial excitement or rewards but then have little understanding of the long-term consequences of being involved. Others may say they are “choosing” to do it to support their family because they do not have other choices of work. In addition, boys have been observed in massage parlors in SiemRiep, Cambodia, and Chiang Mai, Thailand. Children, having not reached the age of majority and having not reached mental maturity, cannot give meaningful consent to participation in the commercial sex industry. Their involvement in prostitution activities in actuality is child sexual abuse in a commercial sex context.

This research is intended to provide an initial understanding of prostituted male youths in the male-to-male massage industry and their sexual exploitation so that organizations can acknowledge their existence, consider their needs and vulnerabilities, and take appropriate action.

Literature Review

Sexual Abuse and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Young Males

Holmes and Slap (1998) claim, “The sexual abuse of boys is common, underreported, under-recognized, and undertreated,” (p. 1860) and this extends to commercial sexual exploitation. In South Asian societies the existence of sexual abuse of boys and young males is often denied (Frederick, 2010). Boys tend to be seen as being able to care for and protect themselves, which often results in them being given a greater amount of “freedom.” This “freedom” may, in fact, increase their vulnerability since they are away from the home and less supervised in their activities than girls (Frederick, 2010).

McIntyre (2005) suggests that 70 percent of the 37 young males in her study had a history of being sexually abused prior to entering the sex industry. The young males had poor family relationships and 95 percent of participants had a history of running away from home. The majority of these experienced situations in which they were offered food and shelter in exchange for sex. In addition, extensive drug use was noted, which for many of the young males began when they began being prostituted.

As these studies illustrate, sexually exploited men and boys have been identified globally. Yet, such men and boys have largely been ignored by social service and anti-trafficking agencies. Mass media and academia have failed to draw much attention to the victimization of males in the commercial sexual exploitation industry. Additionally, there is a lack of social service agencies to assist them (Dennis, 2008).

To the extent that this group is studied, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections have tended to be the main focus of research and programs, to the neglect of other aspects of these males’ lives, such as tackling the prejudice and violence they experience from the community and clients and accessing alternative employment.

Sexual Abuse of Boys in South Asia

The prostitution of boys is an unmentionable subject in much of South Asia, and thus, there is little information about the boys who are involved in prostitution. However, End Child Prostitution And Trafficking (ECPAT) International has conducted studies in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. There are a number of culturally specific practices in different countries related to sexual exploitation of boys and some are described here.

In parts of Pakistan, there is a traditional practice called *bachabazi* in which boys are kept and used for sex by older men (Akula, 2006; Ali & Sarkar, 2006; Muhammad & Zafar, 2006).

In India, the *hijra* (eunuch) community is a stigmatized group that is often sexually exploited. Effeminate boys may also become folk entertainers, such as Luanda dancers. As members of either of these communities, boys are at high risk of physical violence, hate crimes, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse (Lahiri & Kar, 2007). Such boys are at high risk for contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). They are also often labeled as homosexual, whether or not they identify themselves as such.

In Bangladesh, as in other Asian countries, homosexuality is an unacceptable practice and violates “public nuisance” laws (Ali & Sarkar, 2006) so male-to-male sex constitutes a criminal risk for young males who are being sexually exploited.

In Sri Lanka it is estimated that 90% of prostituted children are boys (Todres, 1999).

In many Asian societies where the culture places high emphasis on the virginity of females, males-to-male sex with boys may be more acceptable because boys are unable to become pregnant and have no physical sign of virginity (Frederick, 2010).

Sexual Abuse of Boys in the Cambodian, South-East Asian Context

In 2008 Hilton and associates published the study, “I Thought It Could Never Happen to Boys,” a qualitative study of 40 boys and young men in three different locations in Cambodia. In interviews the boys shared their experiences of sexual abuse. Additionally, more than 100 staff members from service providers were interviewed about their experiences working with male victims of sexual abuse (Hilton, A., Kong, S., Nong, S., Oung, S., Sok, C., Seoung, S., Teng, P., Long, V., & Meng, D. 2008).

The risk factors for sexual abuse of boys identified in Cambodia in the Hilton study were similar to those identified in other studies of male sexual abuse. These factors included poverty, family difficulties (i.e. single-parent household, domestic violence), living on the street, little education, and drug or alcohol abuse. Many of the boys had experienced violence and admitted to having little knowledge about sexual issues prior to being abused (Hilton et al., 2008; Keane, 2006). The after-effects of abuse cited by boys in Cambodia were also similar to those in other research, including feelings of shame, fear of consequences of disclosing abuse, uncertainties related to sexuality and gender, self-blame, psychological trauma, and substance misuse. Young men who had experienced sexual abuse as boys cited long-term physical, emotional, and psychological problems (Hilton et al., 2008).

Within Cambodia there is a common practice of showing affection

to male children up to the age of three years by touching or kissing their genitals, likely as a way to soothe them when they are upset (Hilton et al., 2008; Miles & Sun, 2006). As boys age, it is not unusual for adults to grab boys' genitalia or expose boys' genitalia as a joke (Hilton et al., 2008). Additionally, researchers observed that if there is uncertainty of the gender of a child, such as a girl with short hair or a boy with feminine features, it is common for adults to grab the genital area of the child in order to check for a penis (Miles & Sun, 2006, p. 36). Culturally, these are not considered to be abusive actions and there are even debates in discussions among those involved in child rights regarding whether it is abusive.

The authors expect that this would affect/skew reporting of sexual abuse of boys. However, those children who had the opportunity to respond about their feelings and experiences of having their genitals touched were in agreement that it was an unwanted form of attention causing them to feel angry and embarrassed (Hilton et al., 2008).

In a 2005 study with a random sample of children, 15.7 percent of boys aged 12-15 years in Cambodia said they had been sexually touched on the genitals by an adult before the age of 9 years with 18.9 percent of boys saying they had experienced this after the age of 9 years (Miles & Sun, 2005). The study also found that 13.5 percent of girls aged 12-15 years in Cambodia had been sexually touched on the genitals before the age of 9 years and 13.5 percent had experienced this after the age of 9 years (Miles & Sun, 2005). This suggests that both boys and girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation.

Whilst vulnerability of girls is understood with special concern of loss of virginity, for boys it is less so. A Cambodian proverb suggests that girls are like cloth. If thrown in the dirt they became stained forever whereas a boy is like gold, which, if soiled, can quickly be wiped clean. The challenge with this saying is that girls are seen to be unrecoverable whereas boys are seen to not require any serious follow-up after abuse, both of which could be damaging for their recovery and again reflecting the idea of boys being resilient when they are also vulnerable and girls being vulnerable when they are also resilient. This could contribute to the reason why there are also increasing numbers of young males entering the sex industry.

In Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia, there are hundreds of "massage" parlors where young women provide sexual services to men. There are also increasing numbers of "massage" establishments where young men are providing the same for other men. These locations cater to both foreign and local clientele but probably the majority being for Cambodian clients.

Action Pour Les Enfants (APLE) conducted a study on the child victims of sexual exploitation in Cambodia. APLE found that 80 percent of child victims of street-based sexual exploitation in Cambodia are boys (Keane, 2006). Although the majority of boys who participated in Cam-

bodian studies identified foreign perpetrators (Keane, 2006; Hilton et al., 2008), there were still a number of boys who disclosed sexual abuse by Cambodians, including relatives, neighbors, other adults, and other adolescents (Hilton et al., 2008). Although APLE confirmed that child sexual exploitation is more often perpetrated by Cambodian nationals than by foreigners, their research focused more on *foreign* perpetrators of sexual exploitation (Renault, 2006). APLE has been successful in prosecuting a number of these foreign sex offenders, but the prosecution of Cambodian nationals is still limited, perhaps because foreigners are easier to identify and more politically expedient to prosecute than locals. For example, in 2011, there were a number of cases of sexual abuse and/or exploitation of boys in Cambodia highlighted in news publications. In the February 18, 2011, issue of *The Cambodia Daily*, an article appeared about an American doctor who had been arrested on suspicion of sexually abusing three boys between the ages of 6 and 15 years old. The boys had been living with him under the false front that he had adopted them (Saing & Vrieze 2011). In April 2011, a Japanese man was sentenced to two years in prison for paying for sex with children, namely a 15 and a 16-year-old boy (Phak 2011). Due to confidentiality issues, First Step reports on increasing numbers of cases of men where young males are raped by Cambodian men but prosecution does not occur.

In reviewing the existing literature about the sexual abuse of males and the male sex industry, there is insufficient understanding of young men who are sexually exploited in the Cambodian context. Our research sought to better understand the young men who are prostituted in the male-to-male massage industry in Phnom Penh.

Methodology

Access

In December 2010 and January 2011, surveys were conducted by Hard Places Community (HPC) in Phnom Penh at six massage parlors employing males and advertising to men. This was following an investigation supported by Love146 in order to explore the extent of sexual exploitation of young men in Cambodia. At the time the survey was conducted, these six locations were the only ones Love146 knew to exist in Phnom Penh. Although the existence of other places outside the capital was also known, the focus was on Phnom Penh because Hard Places Communities is based there, so could do follow up. Contact was made with managers and owners of the establishments, and permission was granted for the surveys to be conducted with employees during off-peak hours. All of the respondents were employed as masseurs at one of the six locations. The managers and owners were responsible for determining which of their employees would participate in

the survey. There were a total of 45 surveys completed. Interviewers were three local Cambodians and one expatriate. All surveys were conducted in the local language (Khmer) without the aid of a translator. Researchers were grateful to have access at that time. A raid was conducted shortly after this research took place, and the Government closed one establishment. If this had occurred prior to the interviews, it may have caused managers to limit access of their establishments to the research team.

Design and Ethics

The survey used was adapted from a similar tool used with male masseurs in India (Miles &Thakur, 2011). Adaptations were made by the researchers to make the survey more contextually relevant for the cultural and economic context of Cambodia. The survey was a combination of multiple choice and open-ended questions. Quantitative data analysis was completed using SPSS 16.0. Qualitative data from open-ended questions was examined for consistent patterns and differences.

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process (Ennow, et al., 2009). The respondents were informed about the purpose of the survey before consenting to participate. To ensure that the respondents would not face any adverse consequences should they choose to participate in the research, permission was first gained from the employers of the respondents. Interviewers visited the locations in pairs to ensure safety and accountability. The respondents were informed prior to engaging in the survey that they could choose not to answer any question and could choose to stop the survey at any time. Interviewers who were NGO staff were trained by the researcher about the importance of confidentiality and to give appropriate respect to respondents and use appropriate language. Interviewers sought to establish a rapport with respondents explaining the research and its purpose. No promises were made to the respondents about the services or programs that could result from the survey results beyond what was possible. The respondents were not compensated for their participation, but the research team was careful to conduct interviews during off-peak hours for the respondents. They were also informed that if they needed to stop the survey at any time in order to serve a client, they were free to stop the survey and work as needed. Interviewers were careful to ensure that interviews were conducted in a private space. Care was taken to ensure that others did not overhear the interviews. All surveys were kept confidential. Respondents were informed that their individual responses would not be given to their employers. No visitors were allowed during the interview process. No images were taken during the process.

Demographics

The respondents reported their ages to be from 18 to 35 years. The median age was 23. The age at which the respondents reported beginning as a masseur ranged from 17 to 30 years, with the median age being 22 years. However, interviewers noted that some of the respondents appeared to be younger than 18 years. In other research, boys began as masseurs much younger, suggesting that these young males may have been reluctant or advised not to disclose accurate information about their age. In Mumbai, India, a survey of 77 masseur boys revealed that 9 percent were age 10 to 12 when they started and 55 percent age 13 to 15 (Miles &Thakur, 2011).

Of the Cambodian study respondents who answered, 22.7 percent had worked as a masseur for more than two years, up to six years. Additionally, 40.9 percent had worked as a masseur for between one and two years, but 36.4 percent had worked for less than one year. Observations made by interviewers noted that there might be a high turnover rate among masseurs. Interviewers also noted that involvement in this industry may be seasonal work for some of the respondents, suggesting that they may work for a few months to earn money quickly, leave, and then return if they find themselves in need of money without any other job opportunities.

The birthplaces of the respondents varied. Ten respondents identified their birthplace as Phnom Penh, the capital city. For the other respondents, 11 different Cambodian provinces were identified as birthplaces. This is different from a study in Thailand (Grieger, 2012) where, specifically, boys from the Akha tribal group were more vulnerable and the Mumbai study (Miles and Thakur, 2011) where a number of boys were found to have come from a specific village where the NGO was then able to follow up with preventive measures.

Over three-fourths of the respondents had migrated to Phnom Penh. Of those who migrated there, 65.7 percent identified finding employment and making money as their primary purpose for migration. One-fourth of respondents responded that studying was either their sole or partial reason for migrating. The educational levels of the respondents were higher than the percentages found in the General Population Census of Cambodia 2008 (National Institute of Statistics, Cambodia, 2008). More research is needed on whether middle-class youth at University are recruited as “masseurs” in order to earn money to cover educational fees and living expenses.

Results

Entering the Massage Industry

Respondents were questioned about how they entered the massage industry. In response, 71.5 percent answered that a friend was responsible

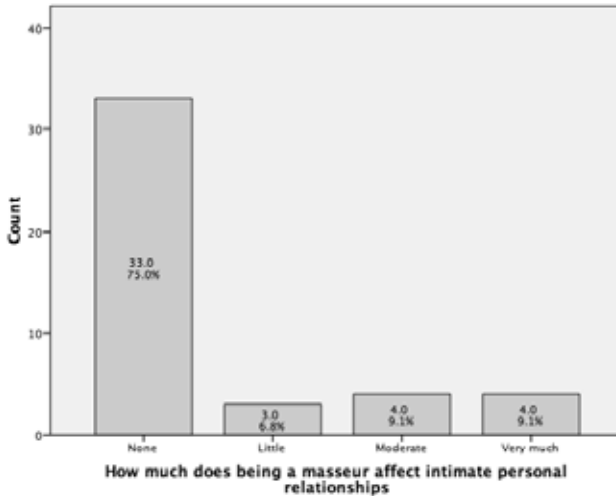
for introducing them. Another 13.6 percent of the respondents answered that they had a previous relationship with the manager of the establishment at which they were now employed. This was because they had moved venues. Four respondents answered that a family member, either a brother or an uncle, helped them get a job as a masseur.

Respondents were also asked about why they became a masseur instead of seeking another job. The responses to this question were varied and some had more than one response. One-third of respondents admitted that it was difficult to find another job. Following that response, 25 percent said they needed “quick and easy” money. Additionally, 18.2 percent of respondents stated that they had little to no education or skills training. Even though the majority of respondents had above average educational levels for Cambodia, they did not feel they had the skills required for employment that would provide a livable wage. A notable number of respondents (15.9 percent) said that being a masseur was an “easy job,” requiring little skill and providing free time to pursue other interests but still paying a reasonable salary.

Effects on Relationships

The respondents were asked if those in their village or neighborhood were aware that they were masseurs. The vast majority (84.1 percent) said that they were not aware of this. When probed for reasons, most expressed that the main reason was because they were ashamed. Multiple respondents admitted to deliberately telling people in their villages and neighbors that they have different jobs.

Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their personal relationships, including whether they had a best friend. The majority, 86.7 percent, affirmed that they had a best friend. Of those, 48.7 percent identified their best friend as another masseur. The remaining responses were evenly divided at 25.6 percent each for the respondent’s best friend being a boy from his village or simply identified as someone else. When respondents were asked how much being a masseur affected their intimate personal (romantic) relationships, 75 percent responded that being a masseur did not affect their intimate personal relationships. The remaining 25 percent was distributed as follows: 9.1 percent very much affected, 9.1 percent moderately affected, 6.8 percent minimally affected. One respondent did not provide an answer to this question.

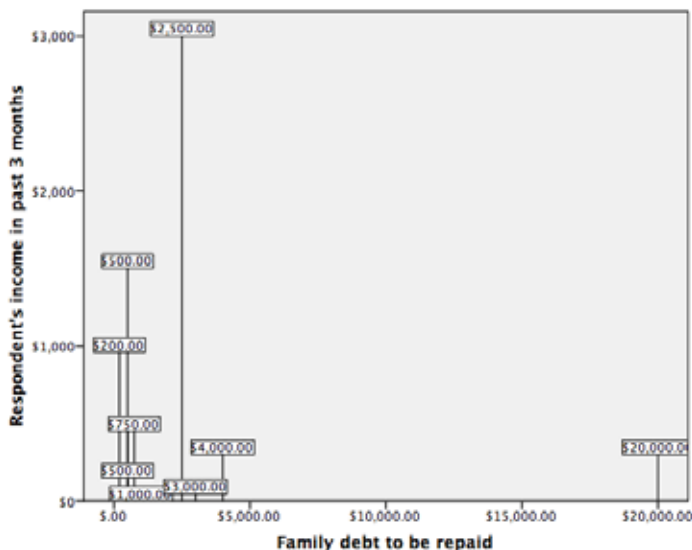
Figure 1: Effects on Intimate Personal Relationships

However, if this information is considered in light of the responses that most of respondents have not told anyone in their villages or neighborhoods, and in some cases their families, of their employment as masseurs, the results may not give the full picture. For example, while it cannot be determined based on the information provided, it is possible that if the respondents' villages and families were aware of their employment and if indeed it is believed to be shameful work, there may be more of an effect on the respondents' relationships than these responses suggest. In Mumbai, India, for example, 65 percent of masseurs felt that being a masseur did affect their personal relationships very much and, since these were street-based workers, other people were more often aware of their work as a masseur (Miles & Thakur, 2011).

Financial Implications

Income and debt are often considered significant factors for those exploited in the male-to-male industry. The respondents were asked about both their income and their family's debt. The incomes of the respondents varied widely. The respondents' income in the past week ranged from US\$0, if they had started work but not yet gotten paid, to US\$500. The median income in the past week was US\$40. In response to questions regarding the financial debt of the respondent's family, 35.6 percent answered that their family was currently in some kind of debt. The range of money yet to be repaid was US\$200 to US\$20,000. The median amount of money still owed was US\$625 while mean amount owed was US\$2,829.

Figure 2: Respondents' Debt compared with Income



Additionally, the respondents were asked about their savings habits. More than three-fourths of respondents answered that they had some form of savings. Of the respondents who had savings, 42.9 percent kept it in a bank. This response was followed by 34.3 percent who kept their savings with them. Another 20 percent of respondents kept their savings with a family member, either in the city or in their provincial hometown.

The respondents were asked if they would be interested in taking a job different from a masseur that paid US\$80 per month. This salary was determined as a potential average salary for an unskilled laborer in Phnom Penh. The respondents were given three options with which to respond. Over three-fourths of the respondents answered that they would either definitely or maybe take another job that paid US\$80 per month, with 37.8 percent responding with “definitely” and 40 percent responding with “maybe.” While there were 22.2 percent who said they were not interested in such a job, there were multiple respondents who made additional comments regarding this question. Multiple respondents noted that they required a job with a minimum income of US\$100 per month in order to support themselves and their families.

For the respondents who were currently making equal to or less than US\$80 per month, the responses were more favorable that they would at least consider another job. Over half agreed they would definitely take another job that paid US\$80 per month (See Figure 3a). This number was smaller for those who were currently making more than US\$80 per month with only 29 percent saying they would definitely take another job (See

Figure 3b). Although the number of definite responses decreased as the respondents' income as a masseur increased, there was a rise in the responses of "maybe" by those whose income was above US\$80 per month. Taking all into account, 84.6 percent of those who earned equal to or less than US\$80 per month would at least consider a job different from a masseur that paid US\$80 per month, and 74.2 percent of those who earned more than US\$80 per month would at least consider taking a different job that paid US\$80 per month.

Figure 3a: Interest in Other Employment

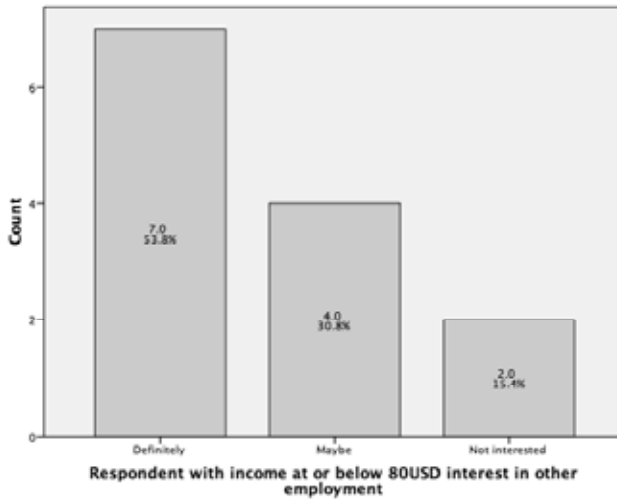
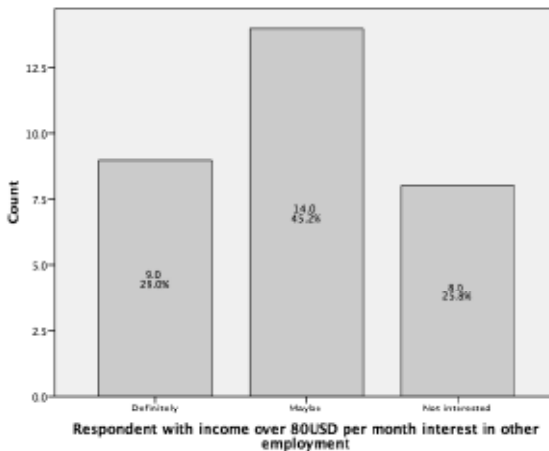


Figure 3b: Interest in Other Employment

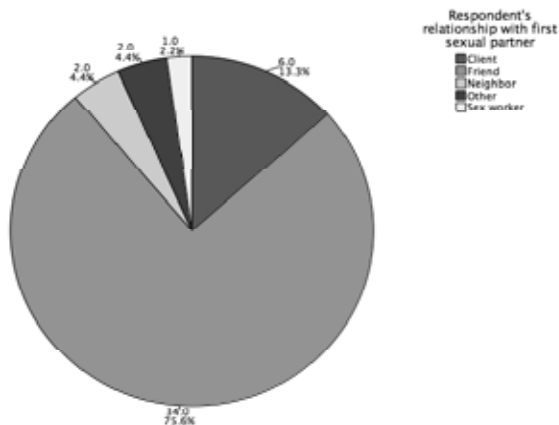


Sexual Experiences

The survey asked the respondents to identify which type(s) of people with whom they prefer to have sex. More than half of respondents identified themselves as men who like to have sex with women (58.1 percent). However, there were notable numbers who identified themselves as Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) (16.3 percent) or as men who like to have sex with men and with women (MSMW) (20.9 percent). One respondent acknowledged an interest in having sex with 'kteuy' ('lady-boys') in addition to other men and women. Two respondents declined to answer this question.

A series of questions was posed regarding the respondents' first sexual experiences. The age of the respondents' first sexual experiences ranged from 16 to 30 years. The respondents identified the gender of the partner for their first sexual experience as 77.8 percent female and 22.2 percent male. The respondents' relationship with their first sexual partner was distributed as follows: 75.6 percent girl/boyfriend, 13.3 percent client, 4.4 percent neighbor, 4.4 percent other, and 2.2 percent prostituted person (See Figure 4). The respondents were asked to identify whether their first sexual experience was consensual or coerced. The experiences were deemed consensual by 68.9 percent of respondents while 31.1 percent stated that their first sexual experience was coerced. Those who identified their first sexual partner as female identified that the sex was coerced 17.1 percent of the time (age of female partner not determined). Conversely, those who identified their first sexual partner as male identified that the sex was coerced 80 percent of the time. In the study with masseurs in Mumbai, India (Miles and Thakur, 2011), where the young man said that the first sexual partner was male, 88.2 percent said the partner was a client which suggests a high number of young men are sexually exploited by male sex buyers rather than sexual relationships they have chosen.

Figure 4: Relationship with First Sexual Partner



Respondents were asked if they had visited a prostituted female in the past three months to see whether there was a potential link between their work and their sexual behavior. Thirty-one percent of respondents admitted to visiting a prostituted female at least one time in the past three months. When this information was cross-tabulated with the sexual identity of the respondents, of those who identified themselves as heterosexual, or as liking to have sex with women exclusively, 48 percent stated they had been to visit a prostituted female. Additionally, 28.5 percent of those who identified themselves as liking to have sex with other men (MSM) responded that they had been to see a prostituted female. If indeed these men prefer to have sex with other men, it poses the question whether there are reasons other than pleasure that they would choose to visit a prostituted female. None of the respondents who identified themselves as liking to have sex with both other men and women admitted to visiting a prostituted female in the past three months.

Respondents were asked about their sexual experiences with clients. Respondents were asked both how many clients they had met for sex last week and how many clients they had met for sex yesterday. The range for the last week was 0 to 60 clients. The median response was two clients ($n=45$). The interviewer checked with the young man who said that he had sex with 60 clients in the past week to confirm that the figure had been heard correctly, but it was unclear whether this large number of clients comprised individual clients or multiple clients together (e.g. sex party). The second highest response was 15 clients and 42.4 percent of respondents identified having sex with one to five clients in the past week. Another 42.4 percent said that they had not had sex with clients but this figure may be inaccurate as some may not have been able to admit that they had sex with clients due to pressure from their manager.

Respondents were asked about the frequency with which they have had sex with multiple clients at the same time in the past three months. The majority, 57.8 percent, of respondents stated that they had never had sex with multiple clients at the same time while 35.6 percent of respondents said they have had sex with multiple clients up to five times. The remaining respondents identified that they have had sex with multiple clients often; six to ten times, (2.2 percent) or more than ten times (4.4 percent).

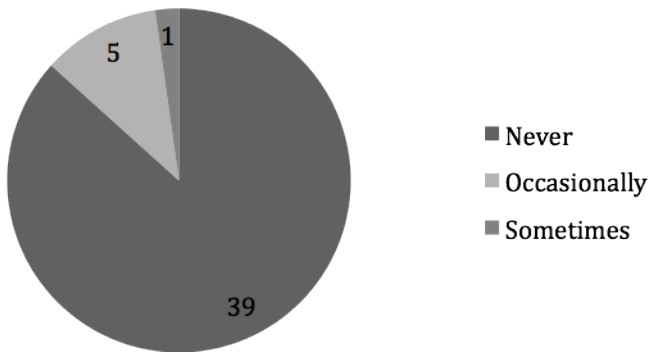
Respondents were questioned as to the frequency with which they and another young man have had sex with a common client in the past three months. The percentage of respondents who answered that they and another young man have had sex with the same client in the past three months was 66.7 percent. Another 24.4 percent identified that they had done this a few times but not often (one to five times). Subsequently, 2.2 percent stated they had done this often, or 6 to 10 times, and 6.7 percent stated they had done this more than 10 times in the past three months.

When separating these responses based on location, it was determined

that at some locations respondents were far more likely to have sex with clients than at other locations. At one location none of the respondents acknowledged that they had sex with a client in the past week while at one of the other locations 100 percent of the respondents acknowledged having sex with at least one client in the past week. The remaining locations varied between 25 and 75 percent of respondents having sex with a client in the past week. However, the majority of locations provide a low fixed income of approximately US\$50.00/month, so if they were not receiving tips from sexual services, according to the young men, it would not be sufficient income.

The respondents were asked if they were aware of young men in the massage trade being forced to have sex against their wishes. Most said they were not aware of this. Only 6.8 percent of the respondents stated that they were aware of young men in the massage trade being forced to have sex and only one respondent chose not to answer this question. However, when the question was posed as to whether the respondents themselves had ever been forced to have sex, the answers were slightly different. While a majority still stated they had never been forced to have sex against their wishes, 11.1 percent of respondents said they were sometimes forced to have sex and an additional 2.2 percent stated they were occasionally forced to have sex. All of those who said they were aware of other young men in the massage trade being forced to have sex identified that they themselves were sometimes forced to have sex against their wishes.

Additionally, 7.1 percent of those who responded that they were unaware of other boys or young men in the massage trade being forced to have sex identified that they themselves were sometimes or occasionally forced to have sex against their wishes. The cultural shame of sexual exploitation previously described means that they may not talk to their peers about what happened so they may not be aware of what is 'normal' and what is particularly coercive or violence. If it happens with a client on their own, they may not be aware of the others' experiences. Specifically, one respondent noted that he was unaware of others in the massage trade being forced to have sex but noted that he, personally, is forced to have sex every few weeks. It is not clear whether he meant by the client or the employer here. He noted that he does not want to have sex with clients, but sometimes he gets extra money. He stated that he only agrees when the "customer is nice." Nice is undefined. All those who responded that they had been forced to have sex were given an opportunity to share their experiences if they wished to do so. One respondent noted that he is sometimes forced by clients to have anal sex. Another respondent answered that on a regular basis clients force him to have sex. Yet another respondent stated, "Many clients coerce me, and sometimes my friend [masseur] to have sex." This respondent also noted feeling both physical and mental pain over this.

Figure 5: Frequency Young Men are Forced to Have Sex

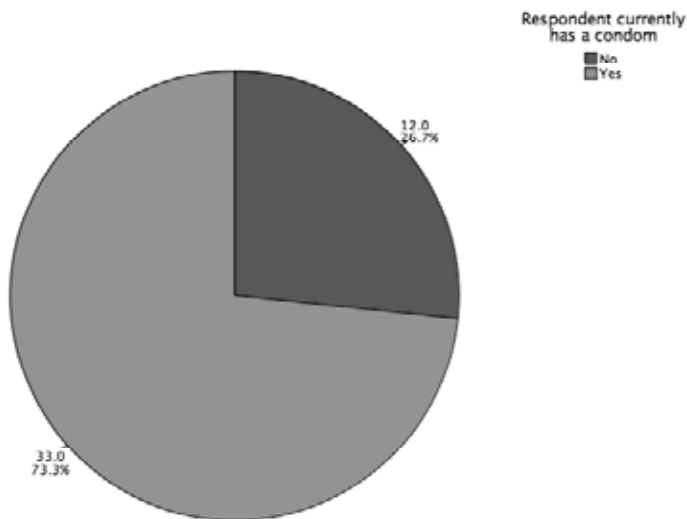
Sexual Education and Health

The respondents were questioned as to the modes of transmission for HIV/AIDS. The primary purpose of this question was to determine whether the respondents recognized that HIV/AIDS can be transmitted via sexual relations. Although 91.1 percent of respondents listed sex as a way in which HIV/AIDS is transmitted, 8.9 percent did not recognize this, which indicates implications for health education on HIV for this population. More than one-third of the respondents admitted to knowing someone with HIV/AIDS. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), there were an estimated 63,000 people living with HIV in Cambodia in 2009, which equates to about 0.5 percent of the overall population. Additionally, UNICEF reports that in 2009, 45 percent of Cambodian males ages 15 to 24 have a 'comprehensive' knowledge of HIV. Those having a comprehensive knowledge are those "who correctly identify the two major ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV (using condoms and limiting sex to one faithful, uninfected partner), who reject the two most common local misconceptions about HIV transmission, and who know that a healthy-looking person can have HIV" (UNICEF, 2010).

Respondents were asked about the purpose of a condom to evaluate whether the respondents understood that condom usage can help prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS and/or other sexually-transmitted infections (STI). More than 95 percent acknowledged that condoms are used to prevent HIV/AIDS or other STIs. According to UNICEF in 2009, 84 percent of young Cambodian males who admitted to having high-risk sex in the last 12 months used a condom during their last high-risk sexual experience. High-risk sex is defined as "sex with a non-marital, non-cohabiting partner" (UNICEF, 2010).

Nearly three-fourths (73.3 percent) answered that they currently had a condom on them. Some of the respondents noted that there were condoms accessible to them at their workplaces, which suggests that the massage parlor operators promote condom usage and sexual health education for their employees. However, 26.7 percent of respondents said they did not have access to a condom, which put them at an increased risk for HIV/AIDS and/or other STIs. It is possible that condoms were not available at some locations because if condoms were available and the location was raided, it could be labeled as a sex establishment and be threatened with closure. However, not being allowed access to condoms is clearly a risk factor for the young men in these establishments.

Figure 6: Access to Condoms



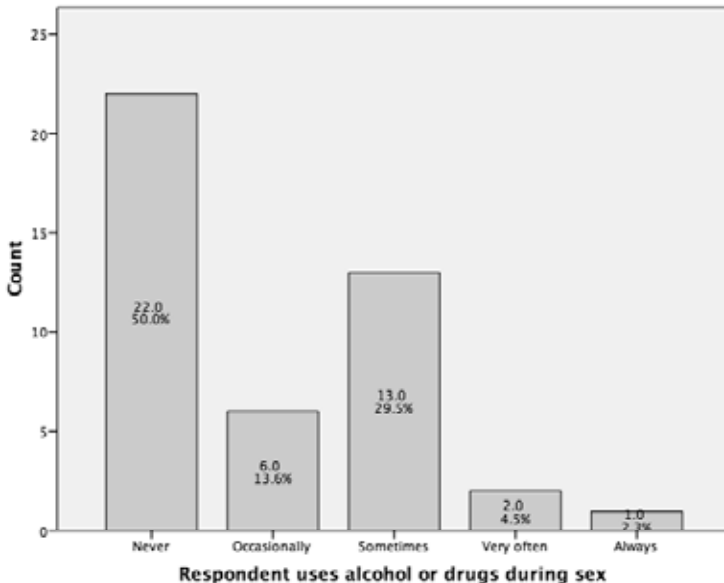
Respondents were asked about their condom usage. One respondent cited that he had never used a condom, but this same respondent reported that he had sex with two clients in the past week. Fourteen respondents (31.1 percent) had not used a condom in the last week. Twelve of those 14 stated that they had not had sex with any clients in the past week. One of the remaining two was the respondent who had never used a condom, while the other respondent answered that he had sex with three clients in the past week. Additionally, seven of the respondents who cited that they had not had sex with clients in the past week did respond that they had used a condom in the past week.

Respondents were asked about their health over the past six months. In response to whether the respondent had any rashes, ulcerations, or lumps in their genital areas, anus, or mouth, 6.7 percent of respondents answered affirmatively. A greater percentage (15.6 percent) responded that they had experienced urethral discharge, difficulty passing urine or pain in their testicles in the past six months.

Substance Abuse

The respondents were asked about illegal drug use and alcohol consumption. Illegal drug use was acknowledged by 6.7 percent of respondents. The only illegal drug identified by the respondents was “ice,” or methamphetamines. Eight respondents did not provide answers to the questions regarding alcohol consumption, but of the respondents who did answer, 96.3 percent affirmed they had used alcohol in the past three months. These respondents were then asked about their alcohol usage in the past week, which breaks down as follows: 13.9 percent were heavy drinkers, 33.3 percent were moderate drinkers, 36.1 percent had a few drinks in the last week, and 16.7 percent answered that they had not had any alcohol in the past week. When asked how often the respondent uses alcohol or another intoxicating substance during sex, 50 percent of respondents responded that they did. One respondent did not provide an answer to this question.

Figure 7: Usage of Drugs/Alcohol During Sex

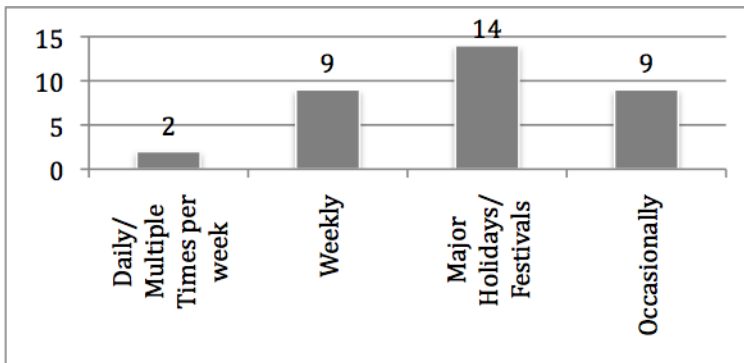


Violence

Respondents were asked about any violence they had experienced in the past three months with regard to police, bullies in the community, and clients. In all three categories, the majority of responses were that they had not faced violence in the past three months. Only 4.4 percent said that they experienced violence from the police sometimes in the past three months. This question may have produced different responses if the boys were on the streets, but all of the males in this survey were working in a closed environment (i.e. massage parlor). This contrasts greatly with research regarding street-based masseurs in Mumbai, India (Miles & Thakur, 2011). With respect to violence by bullies in the community, 9.1 percent occasionally faced violence, 2.3 percent sometimes faced violence, and 4.5 percent faced violence very often. Again, this needs to be read in conjunction with the responses that most of those surveyed did not inform their villages about their work. Violence by clients was distributed as follows: 2.2 percent occasionally faced violence, and 4.4 percent sometimes faced violence. One respondent identified that violence was only an issue when customers refused to give tips, but it was unclear whether the respondent was talking about violence from the client or toward the client. In India, nearly 100 percent of masseurs had faced violence by police, 47 percent by gangs, 42 percent by clients, and nearly 100 percent by members of the community (Miles & Thakur, 2011).

Faith Practice

Respondents were asked whether or not they had a faith or belief system and subsequent questions regarding practices that accompany their beliefs. In response to whether or not the respondent had a faith, 97.8 percent affirmed that they had some sort of faith (See Figure 8). Of those who responded about their specific faith, 80.5 percent were Buddhist, 7.3 percent had faith in themselves, 2.4 percent were Christian, and the remaining responses were various traditional or personal beliefs. Two-thirds of respondents stated that they pray and/or worship daily. However, only 4.5 percent of respondents identified that they visit a place of worship daily or multiple times per week. The most popular response was 31.8 percent visiting only on major holidays or at festivals, followed by 20.5 percent visiting weekly and 20.5 percent visiting occasionally. Though most do not visit a place of worship on a regular basis, 92.9 percent of respondents expressed that they have positive feelings after visiting.

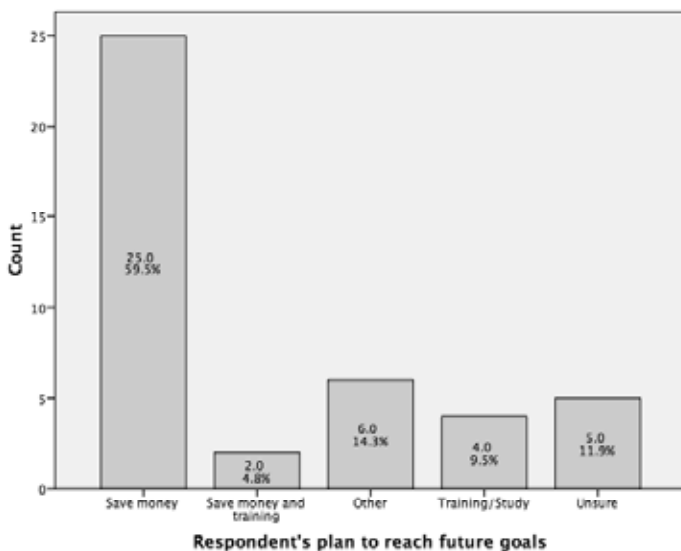
Figure 8: Frequency Visiting a Place of Worship

Future Plans

The respondents were given an opportunity to share where they hope to be in two years. This was asked so that NGOs considering how to offer alternatives to this population may take into account their perspectives. The most popular responses were 31.1 percent wanting to be a business owner and an additional 31.1 percent wanting a different type of employment. Notably, 13.3 percent of respondents specifically expressed an interest in wanting to work in the hairdressing industry, either to own their own shop or work for another person. Other responses included studying, having a family, and returning to the village. Additionally, 11.1 percent of respondents stated that they were unsure of where they would like to be or what they would like to be doing in two years.

The respondents were asked about their plans to achieve these goals. The majority (59.5 percent) answered they planned to save money. For some of them this meant saving enough money to open a business, to be able to study, or to search for other employment. Other responses included 9.5 percent planning to pursue study in a specific field while an additional 4.8 percent said they planned to both save money and pursue further training. Only 11.9 percent were unsure but the remaining 14.3 percent of respondents listed other ways they planned to achieve their goals.

Figure 9: Future Plans



Discussion

Work—Lack of Alternatives

Upon analyzing the data, several notable trends can be identified. Although many of the respondents had a higher-than-average educational level, they still responded that they entered the industry because they were in need of money quickly or lacked specific skills needed for other employment. This suggests the need for a wider range of alternative skills training post-secondary school. It also suggests that there is discrepancy between the number of people needing jobs and the number of jobs currently existing.

At this time little is known about the recruitment process for masseurs. The research identified that many of the young males entered the industry through a friend, but it may be helpful to have a greater understanding of the networks used to recruit masseurs or any other means of finding young males to fill this industry. Are there recruiters? Is there a local mafia/recruitment network involved or is there a move in this direction or is it all free-lance?

Shame

While many of the respondents admitted that they entered the massage industry because they needed money quickly, the majority also noted that

those in their villages, their relatives and friends, were not aware of what they were doing, often because they were ashamed of their employment. They admitted that being a masseur was not a “good” job and that they feared they would be looked down upon if people in their village knew they were masseurs. These responses are cause for further research into the shame associated with the male-to-male sex industry compared to alternative available employment. In another Cambodian study it was noted that males fear disclosing sexual abuse or exploitation, to others because they perceive it may cause them to be seen as “gay” or feminine, which may cause cultural stigma and violence (Hilton et al., 2008). Anecdotal discussion with ‘*kteuy*’ (lady-boys) indicates even greater prejudice and propensity to receive violence.

Violence

Experiencing violence was not identified as an experience the young males in masseur parlors often had. However, it is important to note that these young men were not street-based. In Nepal, research was conducted with street-dwelling boys who had been sexually exploited suggesting that, while a significant number were exploited by adults, peers were the greatest perpetrators of violence and sexual abuse for street-dwelling boys (Hutt, Pant, & Tuladhar, 2011). Additionally, these boys often alternated between victim and perpetrator. It would be useful to further examine the victimization of street-dwelling boys in Cambodia in order to understand the experiences and vulnerability of this demographic.

Coercion

Although most of the respondents denied being forced to, or knowing other boys who were forced to have sex against their wishes, there is a need for further study into the respondents’ understanding of force and coercion. It is possible that the respondents could not admit to being forced to have sex with a client for fear of losing their jobs. Upon analyzing the data, it was unclear whether or not all the respondents had the same idea of what it meant to be coerced or forced to have sex. Providing definitions or examples to all the respondents may have produced other results.

One striking observation found in the research was the comparison of the respondents’ sexual identity with whether or not the respondents had visited a prostituted female in the past three months. Nearly half of the respondents who identified themselves as preferring to have sex with women answered affirmatively that they had. However, it is striking that 28.6 percent of those who identified themselves as MSM answered that they had been to a prostituted female in the past three months, which may indicate that there are alternative reasons for visiting a prostituted female

other than pleasure. For example, could it be because they feel a need to affirm their masculinity to themselves or their male friends if they feel their sexuality is in question? The question also needs to be raised about how a group who themselves experience sexual exploitation feel they can do the same to their female peers?

Future hopes Regarding Work: Willingness to Change to Alternative Work If Available

It might be expected that young males earning a high salary in the sex business would not be interested in other employment, but in this study the majority indicated their dislike of what they were doing. While there were a few respondents who were unsure about where they hoped to be in two years time, the vast majority agreed that they hoped that they would no longer be working as a masseur. For most of them, this did not appear to be a long-term career choice but instead a means to an end. Although many of them did not have a set plan to achieve their future goals, it was agreed that their goals involved employment other than the massage industry.

It appears that the respondents would be open to other employment if they felt they earned a wage that would allow them to support themselves and their families. More than three-fourths of the respondents identified that they had some savings, and the majority of those who had a goal for the future identified saving money as their primary plan to reach that goal. More work is needed in considering how these young men can be supported in reaching their goals through training and career advice.

Religious Affiliation

Nearly all the young males in this study said that they had a faith and two thirds prayed or took part in religious rituals. Religious affiliation may provide some comfort to these young men and this should be researched further. In a context where relationships are unpredictable and unreliable, helping them to explore a personal faith may help some to develop resilience.

While some might consider that this group of young males chose to enter the sex industry, this research gives some indications that while some may enter it “for quick money” (possibly to pay off family debt), but the majority feel that they have no choice and do not appear to be aware of the risks and vulnerabilities (e.g. shame, high risk of sexual transmitted illnesses, excessive alcohol and drug use for some, some level of coercion and violence).

Limitations

While all surveys conducted with participants required informed consent, there were additional difficulties in doing this. First, consent had to first be given by the owners and/or managers of the locations in which these males were employed, which meant that the owners and/or managers had a great amount of control over how the survey was conducted and who participated in the survey. Second, because the surveys were conducted at the respondents' places of employment, they may have been reluctant or unsure about how much they could share, especially when answering questions that may have negatively represented their places of employment. Third, the nature of the survey was quite intense and included asking very personal questions of the respondents. The interviewers had no previously established relationships with the respondents, which may have made the respondents less inclined to share intimate details of their lives. However, they did openly share many intimate details of their lives during the survey process.

Had it been possible, it would have been better to conduct the survey in a neutral location, rather than at the respondents' workplaces. This would have allowed the respondents to feel more at ease and more inclined to provide more thorough answers. It is unlikely that the managers would have agreed to such terms. The cooperation of the location managers was essential in conducting this initial research though it may have had an effect on the results. In the future this collaboration cannot be guaranteed and researchers may need to consider more creative ways of gaining access to this population. It may be more difficult to access young males who are involved in street-based prostitution activities than those who are in massage establishments.

The overall design and execution of the survey presented limitations as well. In conducting the survey, it was discovered that some questions were unclear to the respondents even though they were tested beforehand in a pilot study. Thus, one of the questions was omitted from the analysis and others required careful analysis to avoid misunderstanding.

It may have also been useful to divide the survey into a few separate surveys, which could then be conducted over a series of visits. This would help to establish a trusting relationship between the interviewers and the respondents, which may have fostered more thorough answers from the respondents. However, it was not known whether there would be access beyond the first visit, so it was decided that there was less risk in performing a one-time survey in order to get all the necessary data.

Additionally, it was not possible to find boys who admitted to being under 18 years since it is likely these are more hidden and less accessible. The researchers believe that these young men are at risk and should be identified and supported. However, care must be taken not to assume that young men over 18 years are no longer vulnerable.

Recommendations

One suggestion for further research would include examining the backgrounds of young men in the massage industry. Little is known about the childhood or adolescence of these young men. This information could provide more insight into their entrance into the massage industry and, therefore, possible ways to reduce this. Other research has discovered that many young men who have been prostituted suffered sexual abuse prior to entering the industry (McIntyre, 2005). Research in Cambodia has noted that 18.9 percent of Cambodian boys aged 12 to 15 said they had been sexually touched on the genitals after age nine (Miles & Sun, 2005, p. 29). More research must be conducted in order to understand the prevalence, implications, and long-term effects of male childhood abuse, including sexual abuse, in Cambodia. Hilton and associates' "I Thought It Could Never Happen to Boys" study in 2008 was the first study focused on sexual abuse of boys in Cambodia. The study revealed that sexual abuse of boys is occurring in significant numbers, but that additional research must be conducted to identify the prevalence of sexual exploitation. Assistance and training programs are being developed to assist boys and young men who suffer sexual abuse, such as those by the NGO 'First Step' (first-step-cambodia.org).

Girls are often perceived to become involved in the sexual exploitation trade in order to provide support for their families. Young men are perceived to not have the same familial responsibilities as girls. However, many of the respondents in this study shared that they had some responsibility to support their families. Thus, it is possible that the reasons both girls *and* boys enter the commercial sexual trade may be similar.

The research team made contact with a well-known organization which provides sexual health education and services. The organization said that its partners were working with young men in the massage industry to promote sexual health education, condom usage, HIV testing, and other services. However, one-third of the respondents in this study acknowledged symptoms of sexual health illness in the past three months, which suggests that better sexual health and referral systems need to be in place.

Even those who consider that these young men are not being sexually exploited must be made aware of the risks that such people experience with the excessive use of drugs and alcohol, causing long term additional consequences from the "work" that continue beyond their sexual exploitation.

More research is required about alternative employment to understand what jobs appeal to the young males and how they can be supported to pursue these other alternatives. The data from the research suggests that a significant number of young men are interested in owning a business such as working in the hairdressing industry. This could act as a starting block for future job training and placement, but it is also important to treat each

boy with dignity and respect, allowing him a level of choice in his own future work. Collaboration among organizations offering support and those offering job skills training is needed for the young men to be successful.

Greater awareness of violence and the prosecution of violence, both physical by others and sexual assault by sex buyers, is another area which requires greater attention. More work is needed in order to prosecute the perpetrators of sexual exploitation of boys and young men. This is especially true for local Cambodian perpetrators. Organizations, such as APLE, focus their work on foreign sex offenders, but there is a greater number of local perpetrators who are not being prosecuted for similar offenses (Renault, 2006). If child protection is to be upheld for all children, perpetrators of sexual exploitation of boys must be prosecuted in the same ways as perpetrators of sexual exploitation of girls.

It is important that we also consider the faith of these young men. It is notable that many of them said that they found it a comfort to practice their faith. In a context where relationships are unpredictable and unreliable, helping them to explore faith may provide some stability. Christian organizations such as Hard Places Community recognize that, in order to reach out to these young men, we need to develop deep relationships of trust where they can experience love instead of exploitation. As such they are currently providing English classes to young men who are now opening up and providing deeper insights into their lives.

This research seeks to provide a basis for understanding the vulnerability of young males who are sexually exploited in the massage industry in order to make them visible and start addressing their needs. While girls have long been viewed as victims, boys are victimized as well. In the current donor climate, it is more difficult to get funding for boys' projects. Are Christian organizations afraid of being seen as pro-Gay while secular organizations are afraid of being seen as anti-Gay so that the sexual exploitation of boys falls through the gap? Not enough research has been done to determine the extent of sexual exploitation of young men and boys, which may be occurring with much greater frequency than we currently assume. For example, in Cambodia, there are hundreds of research studies on women and girls compared to a handful mentioning men or boys and even when studies talk of sexual exploitation of *children*, it really means girls.

Christian organizations need to be at the forefront of providing holistic care for boys and young men. They are human beings with hopes and desires and vulnerabilities and needs that require better understanding in order to serve them. The best way to start doing this is to conduct thorough, careful research. ❖

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Key Words: Young men; sexual exploitation; sexual abuse; Cambodia; Southeast Asia; Non Government Organizations

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