



More than Gender

A baseline study of transgendered males in the sex industry in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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LOVE146
END CHILD TRAFFICKING & EXPLOITATION

Sampling



- 50 self-identified transgender sex workers within or near the Phnom Penh area.
 - **35 interviews** collected through data gathering in public areas in Phnom Penh which are known for transgender sex work.
 - **6 interviews** collected from Men's Health Cambodia, a Local Khmer NGO working with LGBT Groups.
 - **9 interviews** collected in residential areas where transgender groups live.
- Purposive and "snowball" sampling methods.

Eligibility Criteria



- Biological Male at Birth
- Self-Identified as female or third gender
- Reporting to have had been paid to have sex within the past 3 months.
- Able and willing to give informed consent to participate in the study.

Ethical Considerations



- Interviewer/Field Researcher training using UNIAP Ethical Guidelines for Human Trafficking Research
- References for Sexual Health, Counseling Services, and Legal Aid provided.
- Respondents could choose to skip any question or stop the interview at any time.

Demographics



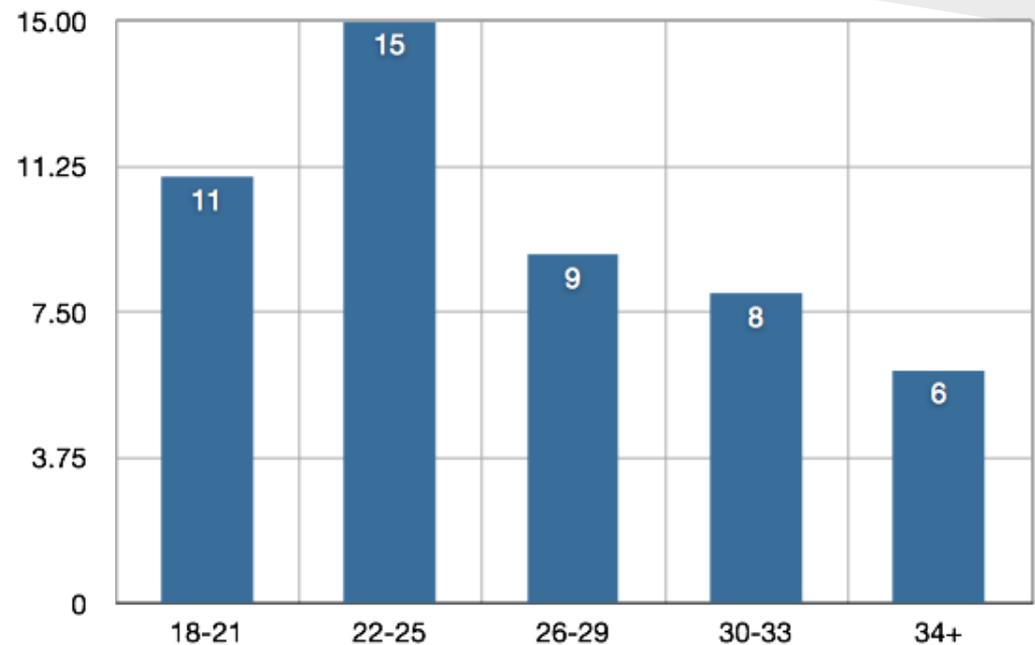
Mean Age: 27

Nearly half of respondents fall within UNICEF's definition of youth (15-24 years)

16% began sex work before the age of 18

88% began before the age of 24

Ages of Respondents



Demographics

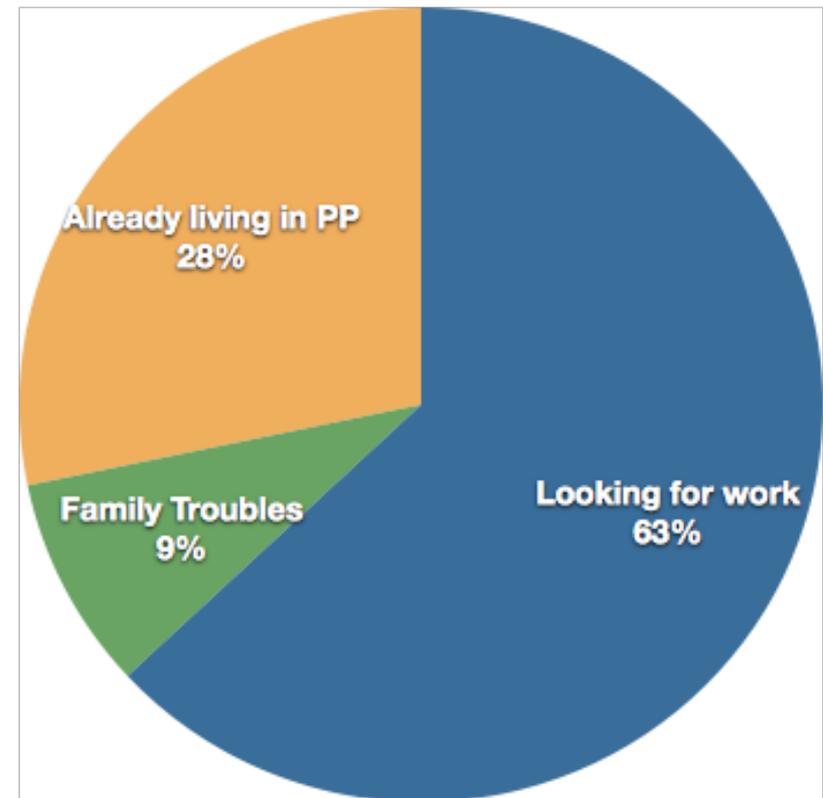


Reason for Migration

14% were unable to complete a primary level education.

Half ended their schooling between the 7th and 10th grades.

Less than 15% have finished a high-school education.



"[I do sex work] to earn and save money: to support myself and to send money to my family. Transgenders can't find a good job."

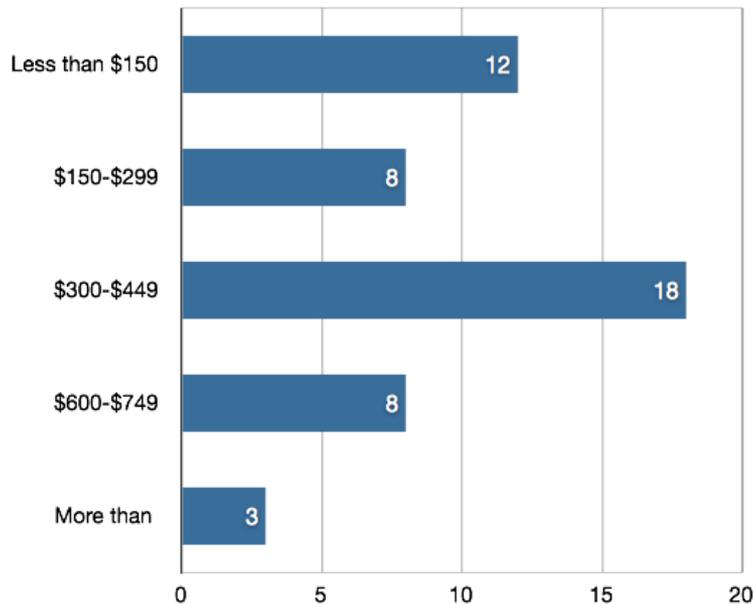
"I am doing this [sex work] to help my family pay our debt. I'd rather get hurt as long as my family is happy. I cry often after I go out with clients."

*"I want to be with men and have sex
with them."*

Financial Implications

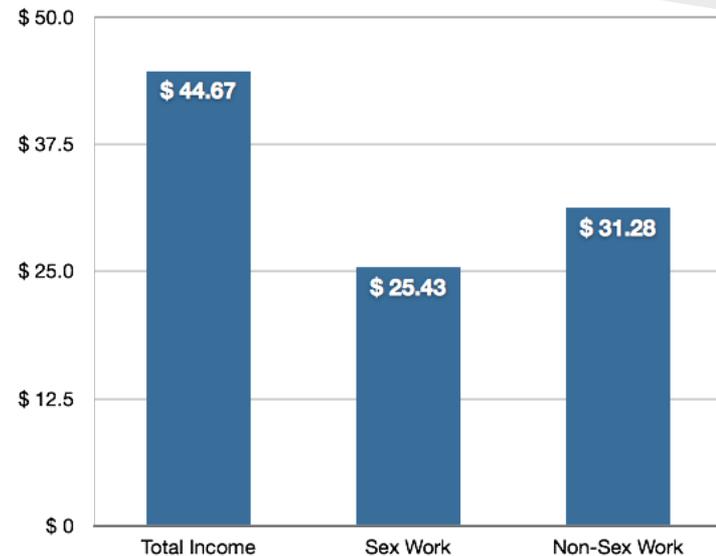


Three-Month Incomes



Calculated average income:
~\$106/month

Income Within the Past Week



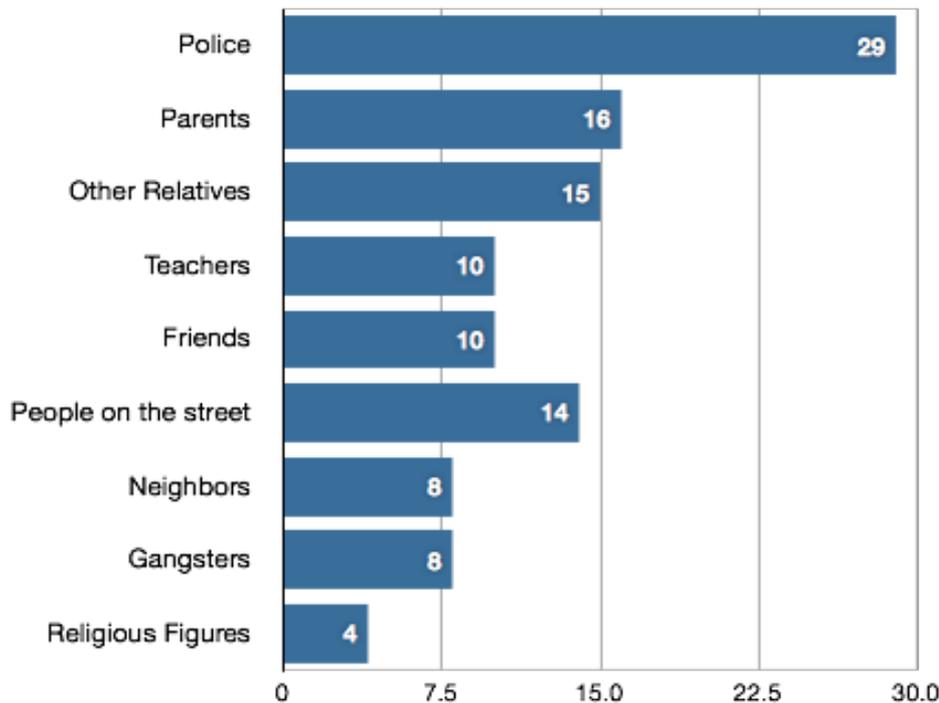
28% state that sex work was their **only employment**

49% state that sex work was their **primary employment**

Stigma / Discrimination



Stated Sources of Stigma / Discrimination



“If I cut my hair short and dress up as a man they will let me study or work, but if I dress up as a girl with long hair I will not be allowed to go to school or work.”

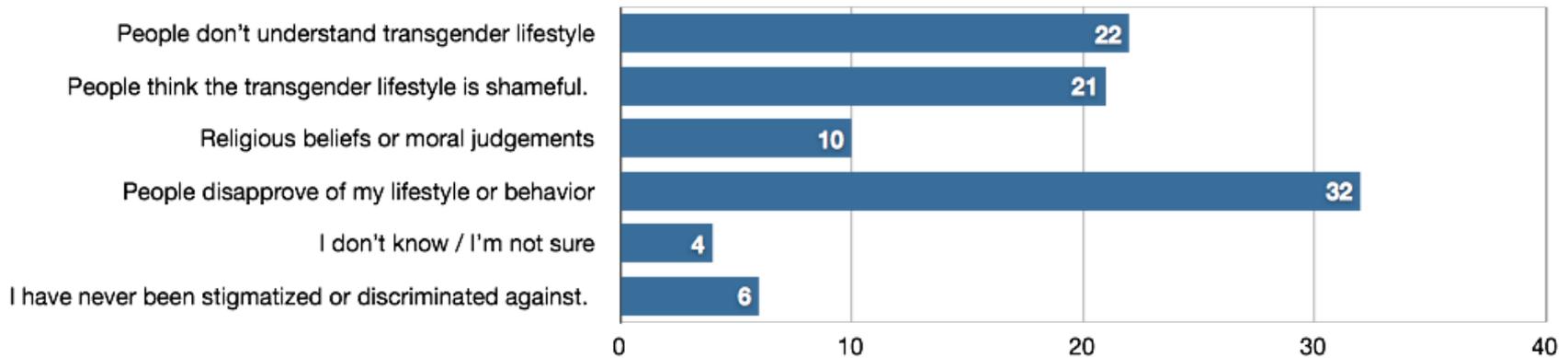
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“People stop me from going to the pagoda because they're afraid I will go to have sex with the monks.”

Stigma / Discrimination



Perceived reasons for discrimination



39% have been refused employment or lost a job because of being transgender

20% have had to change place residence or were unable to rent accommodation.

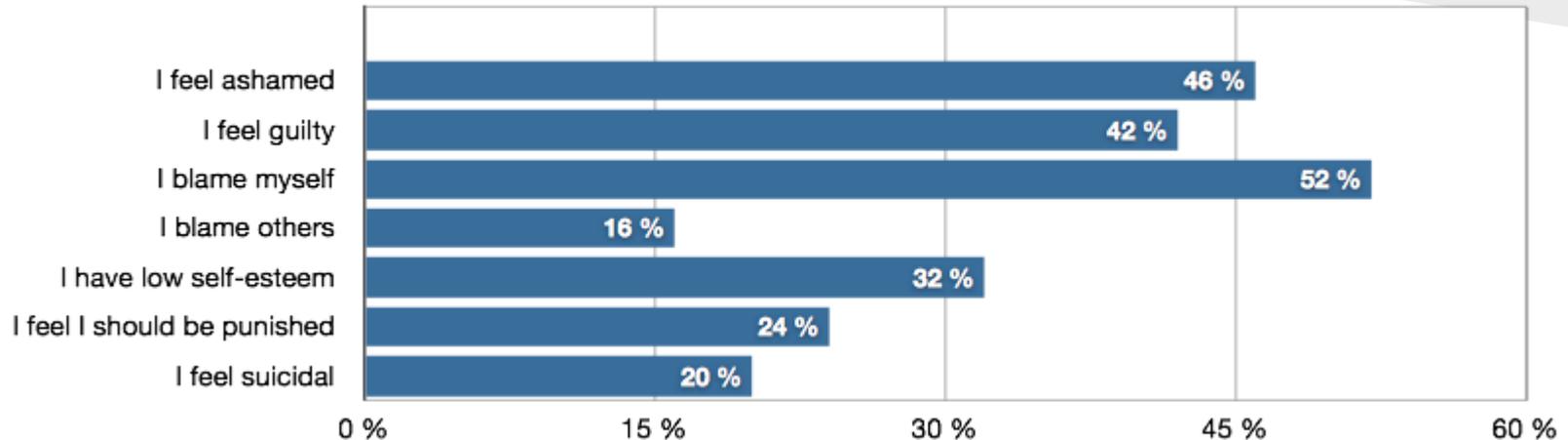
12% have been prevented or dismissed from an educational institution.

10% have been denied health services.

Stigma / Discrimination



Feelings (past 12 months)



"Men make fun me but they don't know that I get hurt by those comments. I can't sleep because of those comments. Everyday, I desire PEACE."

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"I feel angry with people who look down on ladyboys."

"I feel very ashamed because people make fun of me. I regret that I was born like this. I blame myself. Why was I not born as a girl? I feel suicidal when I think about my boyfriend breaking up with me."

Relationships



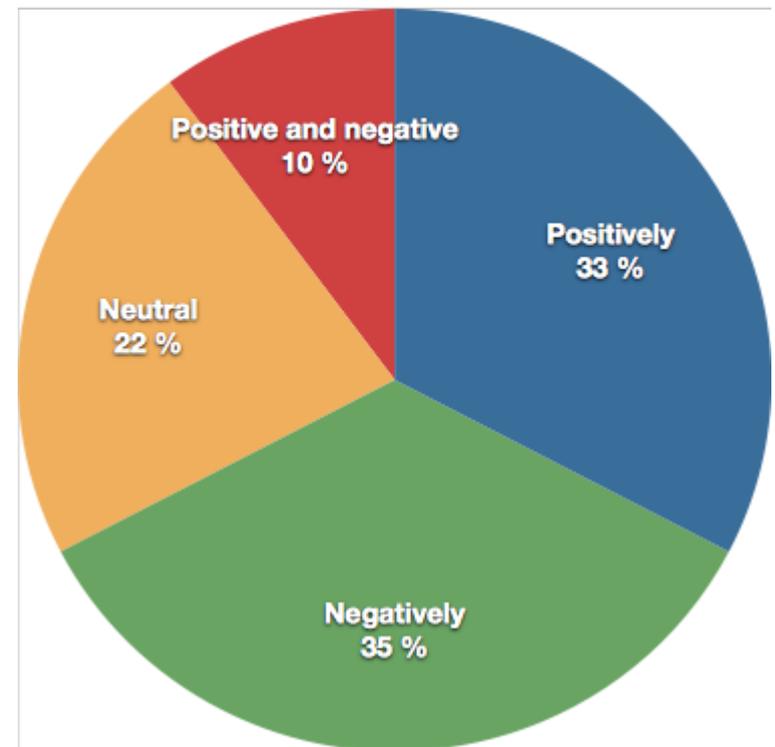
Family awareness:

88% of respondents indicate that their families are aware that they are transgender
12% of families are unaware

Presence of Best Friend

96% have a best friend
90% of their best friends are another transgender

Effect on intimate relationships

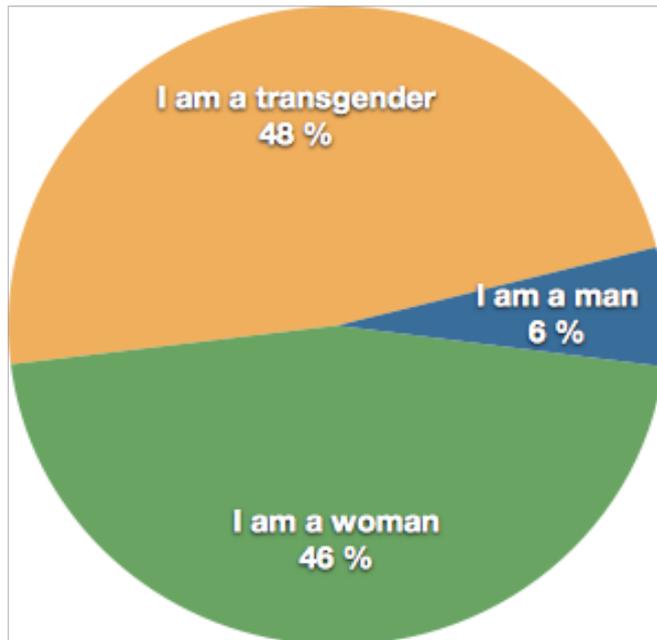


"[My friends] love me, I have friends that are bi-sexuals, girls, transgender. My family does not accept me - I'm the only son."

Sexual / Gender Identity



Understanding of Own Gender

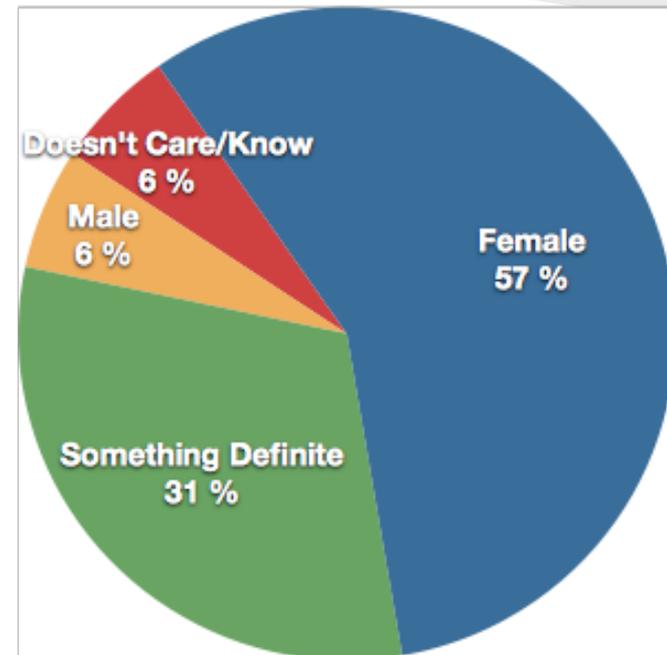


Sexual Preference:

Straight Men: **98%**

Gay Men: **58%**

Hopes for Reincarnation



Gender Role Dichotomies:

"Real" Man

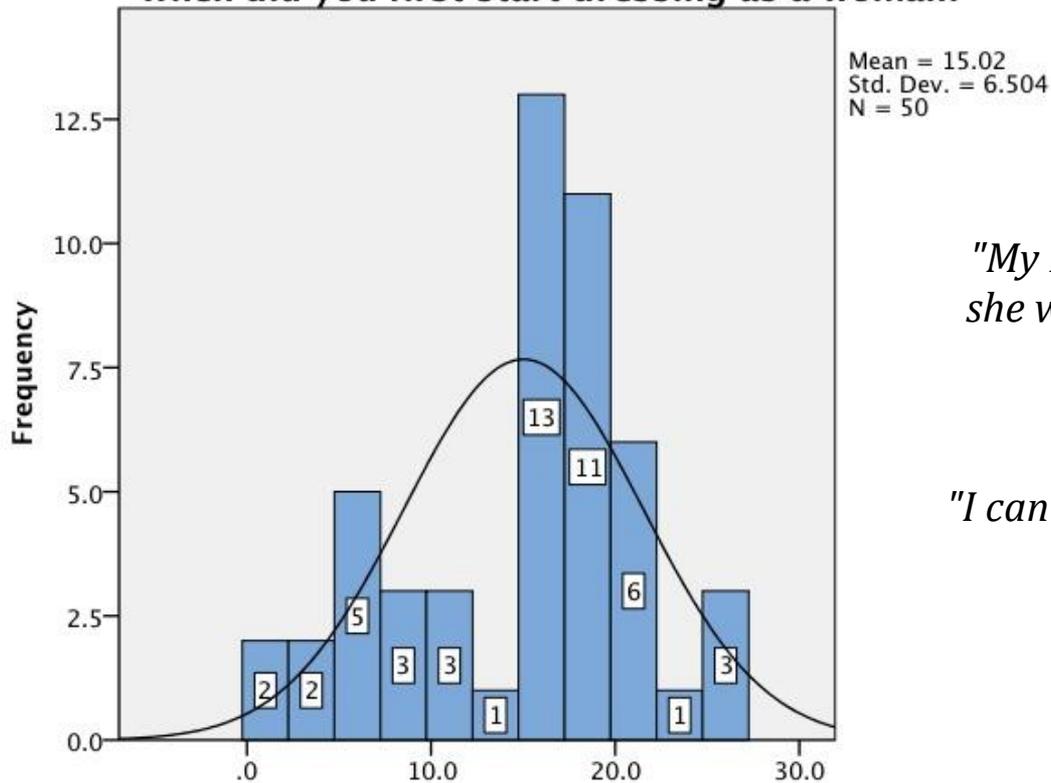
"Real" Woman

*"I want to be a real person, like a man
or a woman."*

Sexual / Gender Identity



When did you first start dressing as a woman?



"My Mum dressed me as a girl because she wanted a girl. I was the first child."

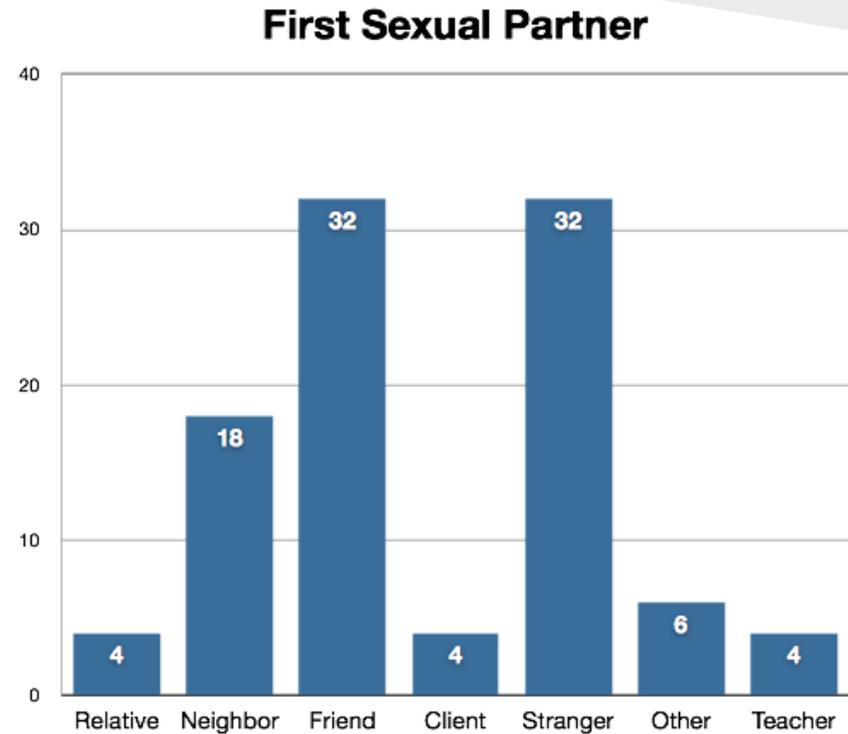
"I can't fight nature. I'm pretty and I love myself."

Sexual / Gender Identity



All stated that their first sexual partners were male.

For 1 in 5, their first sexual experience was 'forced or coerced'.

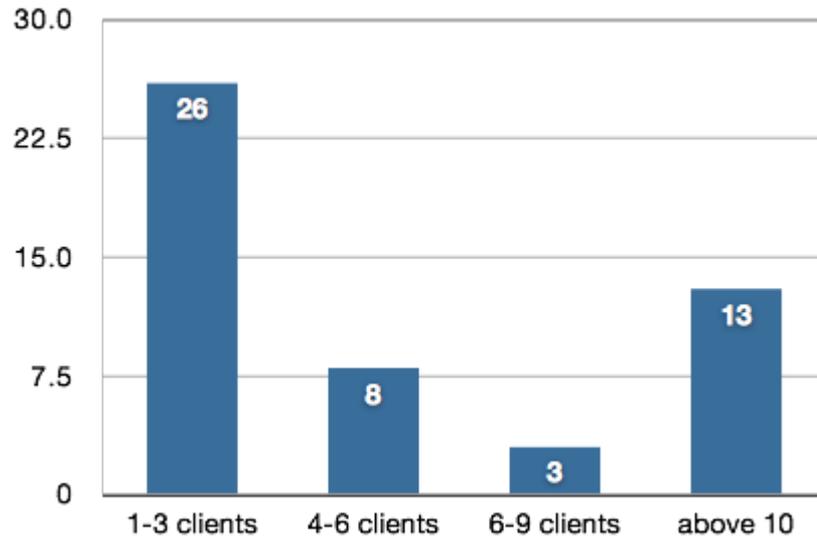


"When I was 12 a group of people took me far away from home, beat me up and left me there. One guy (25) rescued me and took me home. He asked if he could have sex with me. I said yes because he rescued me."

Sex Work



Clients per week



Average = 7; Minimum = 1; Maximum = 35.

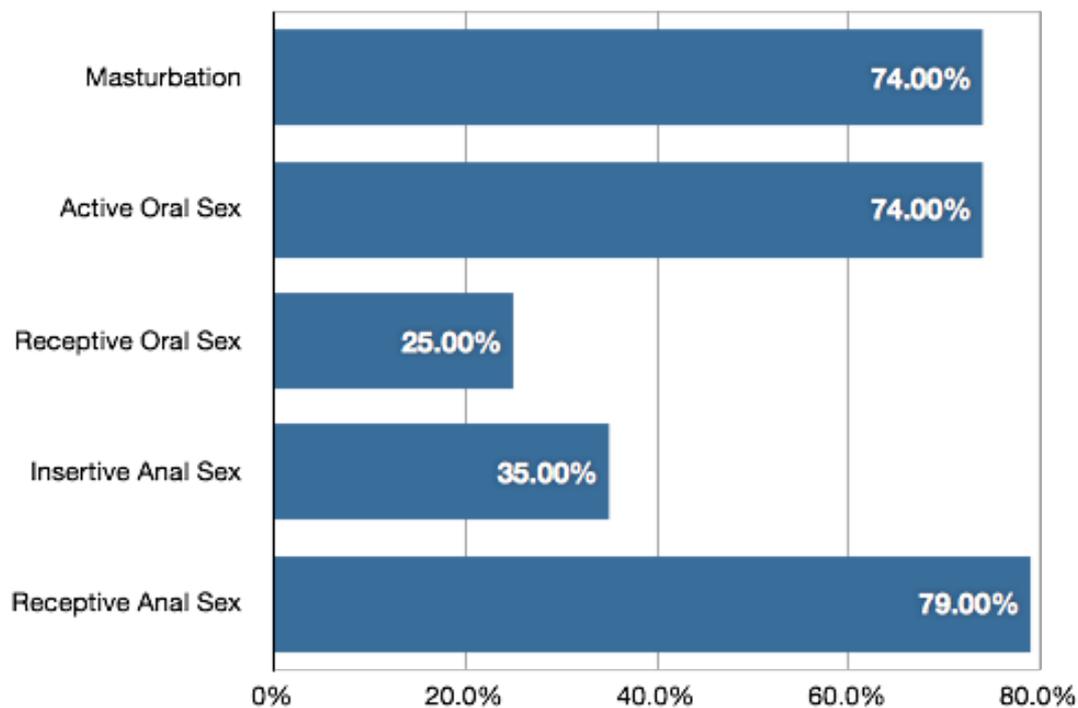
75% of clients are Khmer

36% indicate group sex (orgies) with clients within the past 3 months

Sex Work



Sexual Services Provided



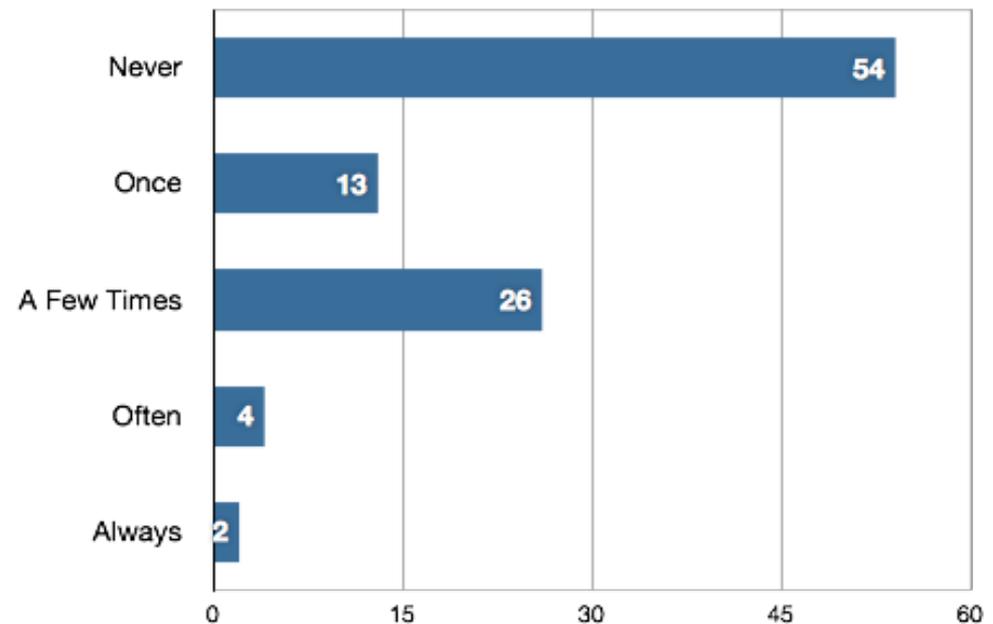
Violence and Sexual Abuse



74% indicate physical harassment (unsolicited touching, fondling, etc) within the past 12 months

40% state that they have experienced physical assault within the past 12 months.

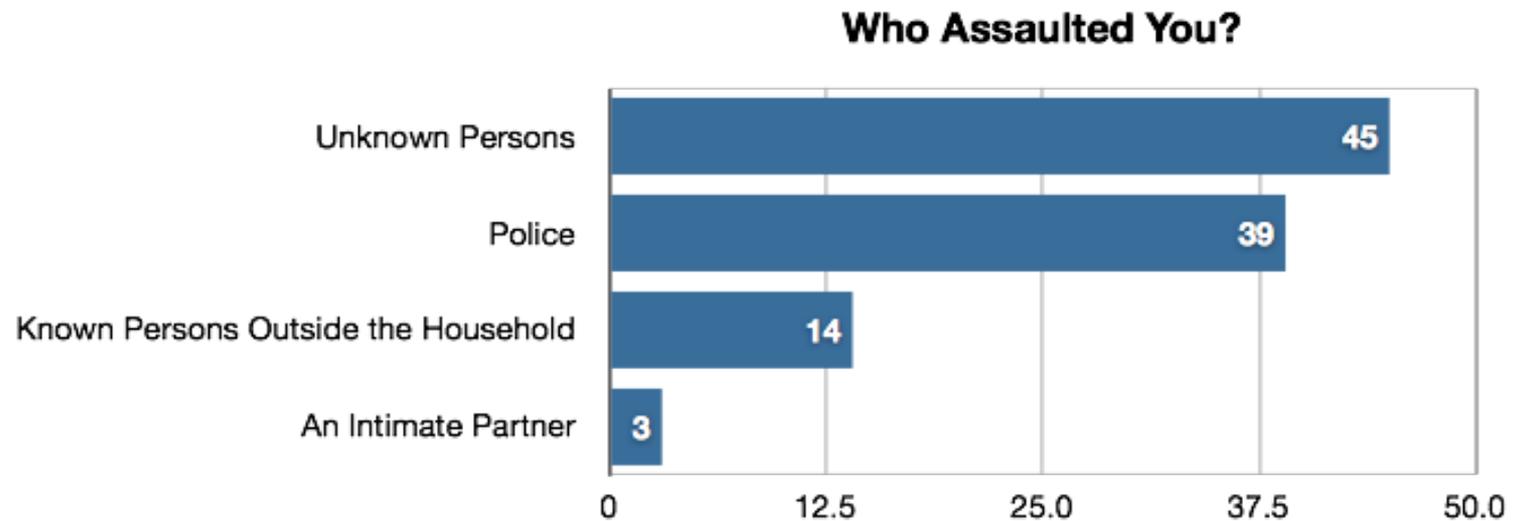
Physical Assault Within the Past 12 Months



Violence and Sexual Abuse



Nearly **40%** of assaults are reported to be **committed by the police**



*"I really hate the police.
They chase us like dogs."*

*"Some policemen come to inspect us
and put drugs in our pockets. When
they inspect us and find the drugs, they
arrest us."*

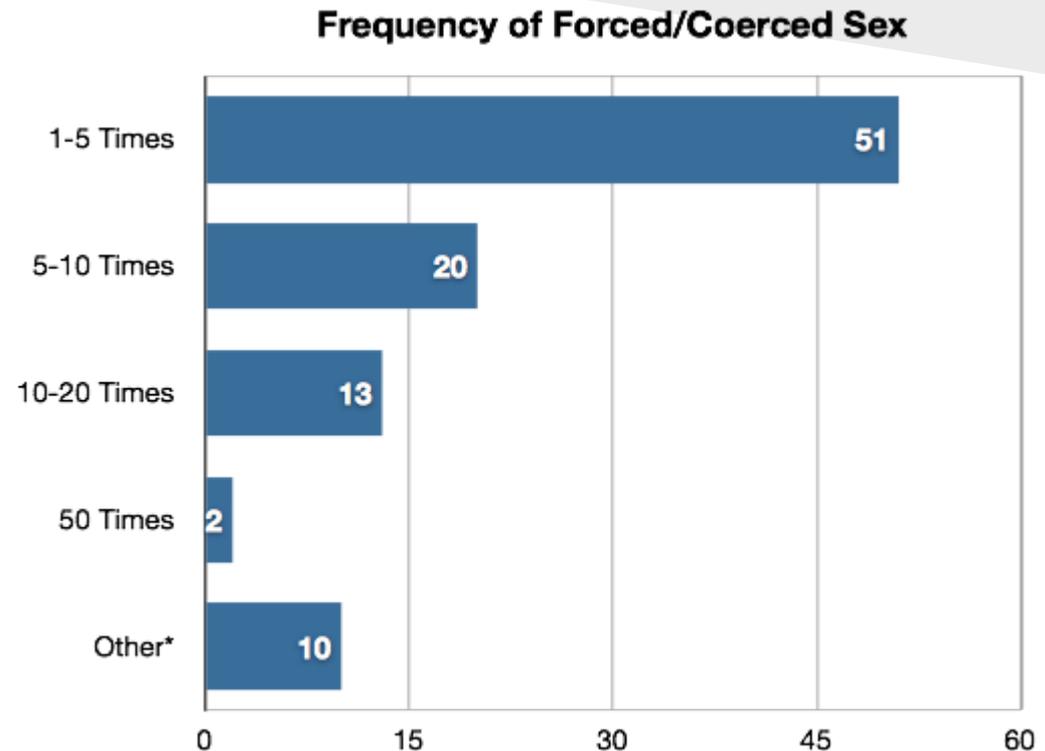
*"Police here pointed a gun at my head,
threatening me to have sex with him."*

Violence and Sexual Abuse



Over half (55%) indicate instances of forced or coerced sex.

54% indicate an awareness of other transgendered persons who are forced to have sex against their wishes.



* Other responses include 3 non-quantifiable responses: 2 - “sometimes” and 1 - “a lot”

Violence and Sexual Abuse

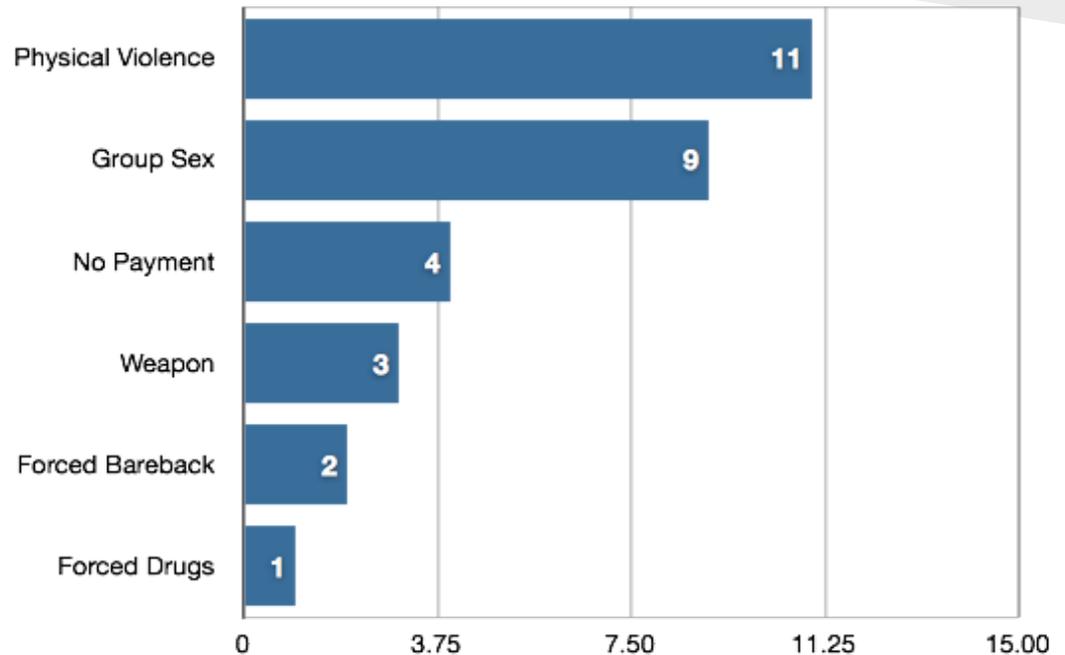


“A group of people forced me to have sex with them at the same time. They held me down and had sex with me. When I tried to move, they pointed a knife at me. They would kill me if I didn't (do it).”

“While I was hanging out with (clients) they enticed me to go to the forest and forced me to have sex. When I refused, they strangled me, so I gave in. It was a group of 6 or 7 guys.”

“If I didn't 'do it well' [oral sex and masturbation] they would beat me up. They asked for money but I didn't give it to them and then they beat me up.”

Content Analysis of Forced/Coerced Sex Narratives



Health



STI Symptoms within the past 6 months:

- **20%** rashes, lumps, ulcerations in genital area
- **34%** urethral discharge, difficulty urinating, pain in testicles
- **56%** indicate other sicknesses (including: cough, fever, flu-like symptoms)

Sexual Health Education/Services:

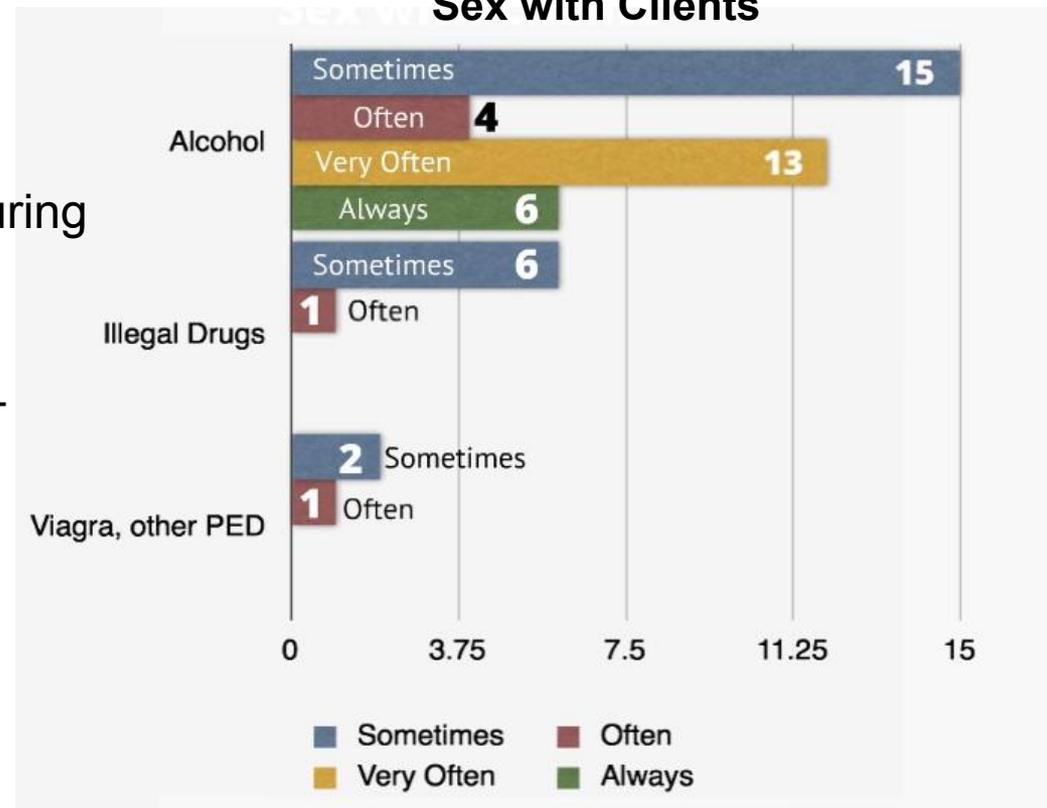
- **92%** correctly identify “Sex” as how HIV/AIDS is transmitted (80% specifically mentioning “sex without a condom”)
- **6%** have never used a condom.
- **32%** have not used a condom within the past week.

Health



- **10%** indicate using illegal drugs (predominantly Crystal Methamphetamines)
- **High** Alcohol Consumption during sex with clients.
- Many used other appearance-altering drugs/procedures
 - **22%** mentioned estrogen supplements
 - Crude facial injections

Substance Abuse During Sex with Clients

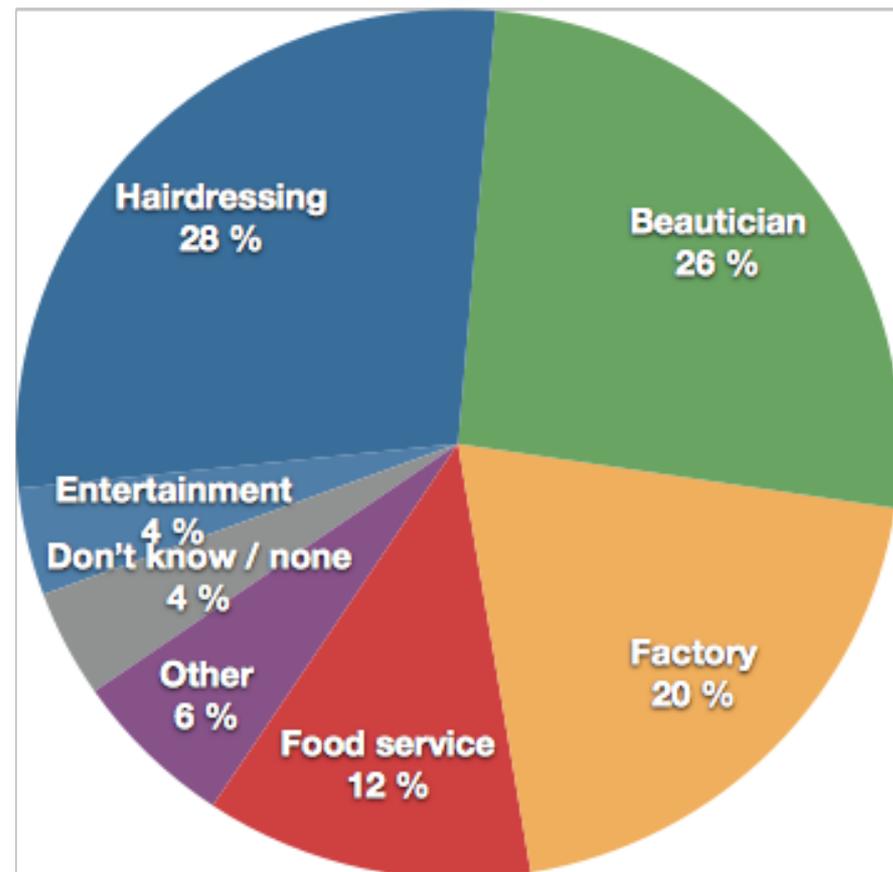


Alternative Employment



"What sorts of jobs are available for Transgendered People in Cambodia?"

Perceived Jobs for Transgender



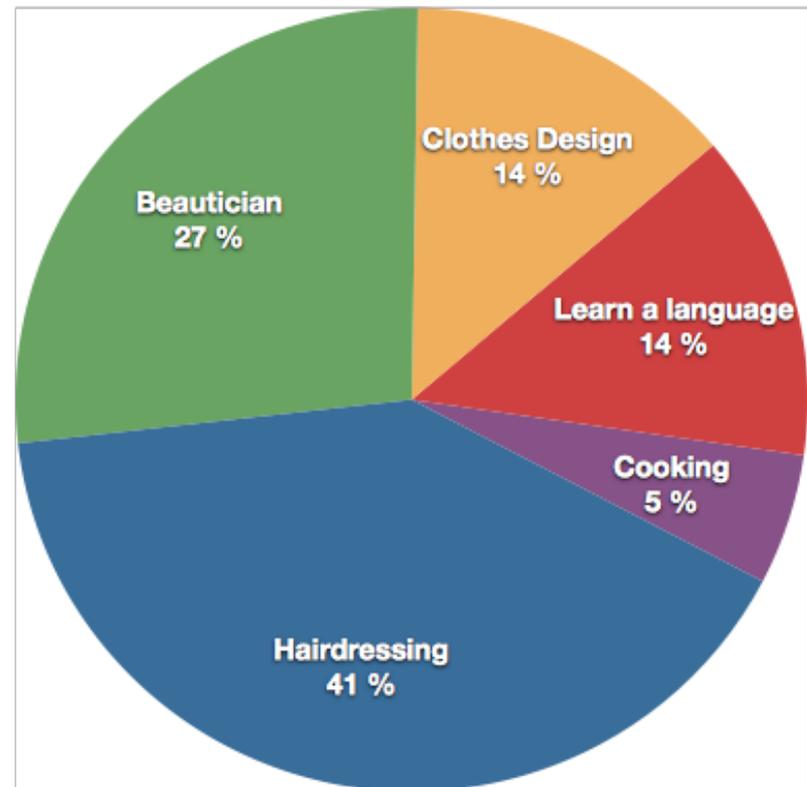
Alternative Employment



64% would take an alternate job to sex work paying \$80USD a month

98% said learning another language would help their income generation and **82%** of these would like this language to be English

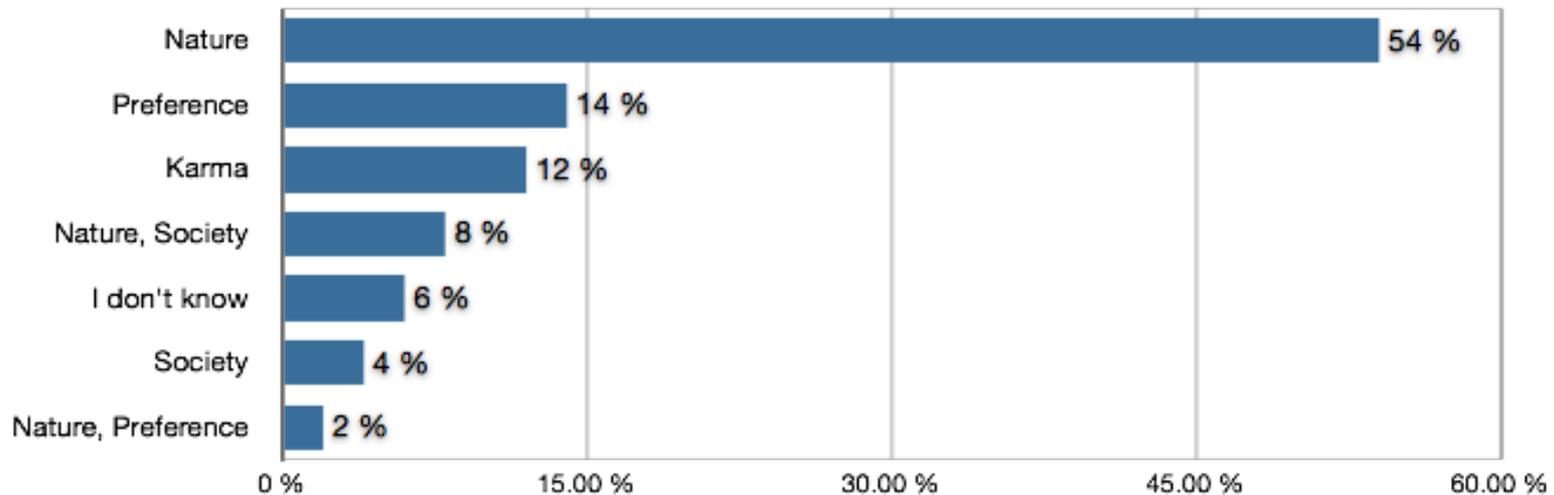
Other Skills Desired



Dignity and Self Identity



What causes someone to become transgender?

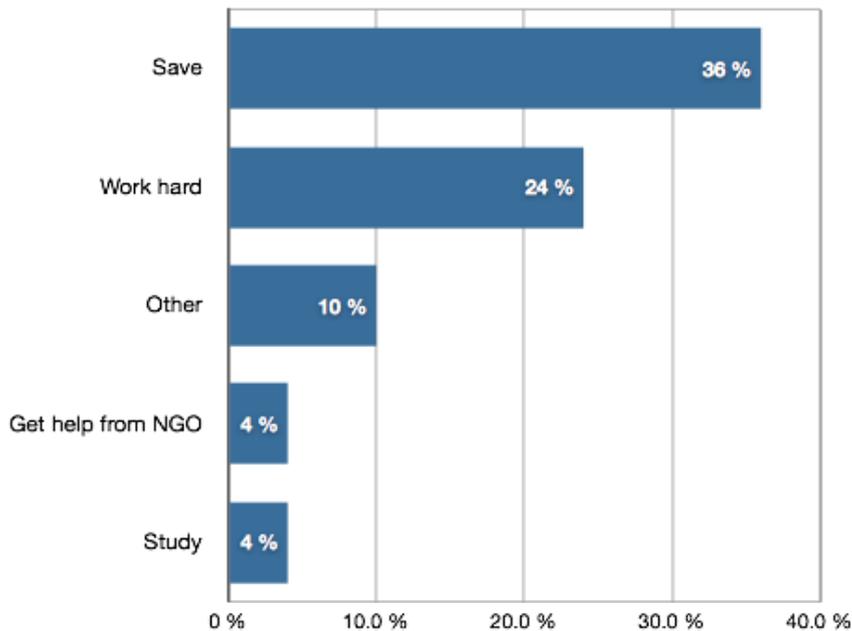


"Karma: the elders have told me that [we] are ladyboys because in our previous lives we have taken other women's husbands."

Dignity and Self Identity



Plans to Reach Goal



Where they see themselves in 2 years time



Dignity and Self Identity



"I try to be a good person even though I'm a ladyboy."

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"Getting rich. If I'm rich I won't do this type of job."

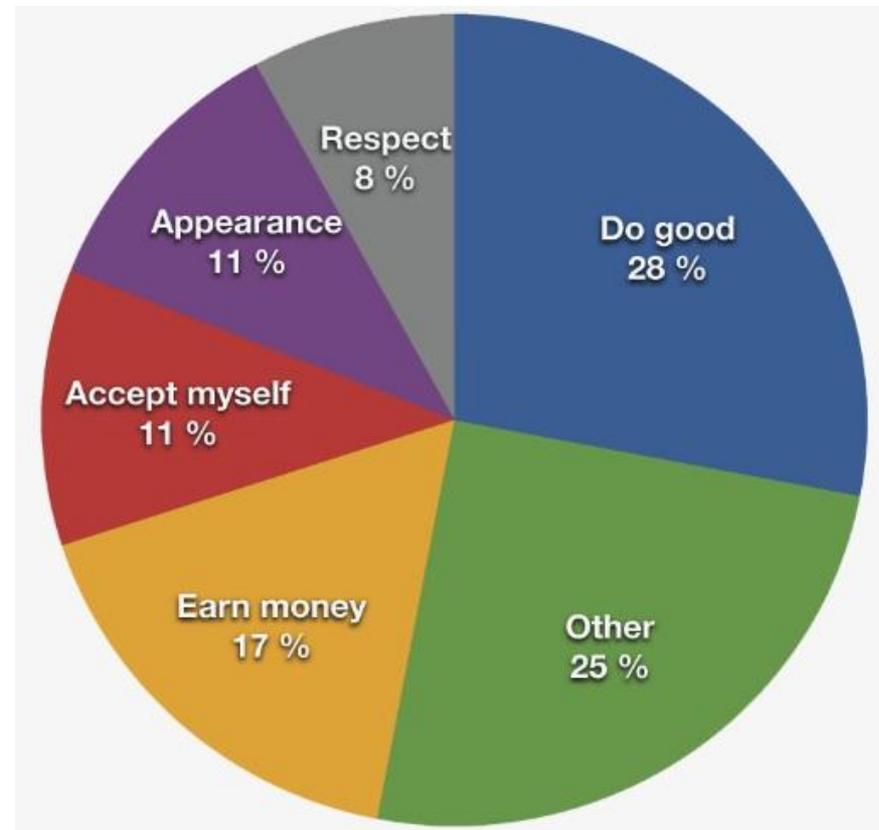
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"I can't really have complete confidence because I'm in between."

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"Respect others, work hard, don't party too much."

What can you do to increase your value/self-confidence?



Discussion



- High Vulnerability for Physical Abuse/Sexual Violence
- Seemingly inherent fatalism within Transgender Social Identity, Narrow perception of options for the future.
- Significant isolation from key identity-shaping structures in society.
 - Common estrangement from Families
 - High-identification with other transgender
 - Little community integration

Discussion



- Significant indication that sex work may proceed from their social identity

*“I don't like sex work, but **I have no choice**. But I like it b/c it gives me opportunity to have sex with men easily. **It is my fantasy.**” (R17)*

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*“I like sex work because it's easy to get sex with men **because I'm a ladyboy** and I can earn extra money to support my life.” (R22)*

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*“Factory work allows me to support my family. Sex work should come naturally **because it's a part of me.**” (R49)*

Recommendations

- Continued **careful** research that recognizes and affirms **holistic** human need/vulnerability.
- Creation of social services and "safe spaces" which cater to the development of **whole, integrated persons**.
- Free or low-cost **vocational and life skills training** programs provided by NGO's or local churches would be greatly beneficial for young men working in this industry.