



**"Don't Look Down on Us!"; Assessing the Vulnerabilities of Female Massage Parlor Workers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia**

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy</i>
Manuscript ID	IJSSP-01-2019-0017.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	sexual exploitation, slavery, sex workers, Women, cambodia, Southeast Asia

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

**“Don’t Look Down on Us.”**

**Assessing the Vulnerabilities of Female Massage Parlor Hostesses in Phnom Penh, Cambodia**

In Cambodia, the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (UNODC, 2008) regulates the definition and criminalization of exploitation in article 10 and defines it to “include the exploitation of the prostitution of others, pornography, commercial sex act, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, debt bondage, involuntary servitude, child labor or the removal of organs.” Sexual exploitation through prostitution is rife worldwide. In Asia specifically, it is an issue that affects people of all ages and genders. According to a UN multi-country study published in 2013, sexual violence is pervasive throughout Asia and the Pacific to varying degrees. Cambodia has been a prime focus of anti-trafficking efforts due to the high prevalence of trafficking and sexual exploitation in Cambodia. Aspects of Asian culture are frequently cited as key factors behind sexual exploitation, including filial piety, low status of women and children, and the association of virginity with purity that cannot be retrieved once lost (Smith-Brake, Julia; Lim, Vanntheary; Nhanh, Chhantha, 2015). Since this is both a sensitive and extensive topic, a more detailed examination of Cambodian culture and values in so far as they relate to sexual exploitation is presented in the following section.

The passage of the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation in 2008 established the prohibition of any type of prostitution in Cambodia and led to the closing of brothels throughout the country (UNODC, 2008). In Cambodia, not only does the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation prohibit trafficking and sexual exploitation, but it even goes so far as to criminalize any form of prostitution. Rather than abolishing the sex industry and sexual exploitation as intended, however, the law has fostered the converting of sexual service provision into illegal, and therefore less observable, channels. Today, it is an open secret that certain establishments continue to offer services that cross these legal boundaries, amongst them a large number of karaoke television (KTV) bars (Miles & Alsiyao, 2019), beer gardens and massage parlors in Phnom Penh. The Age of Consent in Cambodia is 15 years old, the minimum age at which an individual is considered legally old

1  
2  
3 enough to consent to participation in sexual activity. Individuals aged 14 or younger in  
4 Cambodia are not legally able to consent to sexual activity, and such activity may result in  
5 prosecution for statutory rape or the equivalent local law. Cambodia statutory rape law is  
6 violated when an individual has consensual sexual contact with a person under age 15. However,  
7 purchasing sex from a minor aged under age 18 is theoretically illegal. (Age of Consent, 2019).  
8  
9

10  
11  
12 A recent study authored by the NGO network Chab Dai shows that the nature of  
13 commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking has evolved over the past decade, in part due to  
14 the anti-trafficking efforts of the Cambodian government and NGOs (Brammer & Smith-Brake,  
15 2013, p. 14). As a result of these efforts, commercial sexual exploitation has shifted from  
16 establishment-based brothel settings to entertainment-based settings, including KTV, beer  
17 gardens, and massage parlors. Since it is illegal to solicit sex in Cambodia, these establishments  
18 do not officially provide or solicit sexual services. However, a number of studies have shown the  
19 existence of sex work in such establishments (Davis & Miles, 2012; Phlong, Weissen, Holden, &  
20 Liu, 2012, p. 8; Miles & Alsiyao, 2019).  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

28 International and local media focus directly influences anti-trafficking work in  
29 Cambodia, as does the interests of NGO donors, causing the primary focus of anti-trafficking  
30 efforts to be on brothel-based sexual exploitation of women and sexual exploitation of children.  
31 As a result, attention is diverted away from the complicated and less sensationalized reality of  
32 Cambodia's sexual exploitation within the entertainment industry. Research has been found to be  
33 the number one influencing factor in driving the anti-trafficking movement, (Brammer & Smith-  
34 Brake, 2013, p. 69) therefore this research study aims to provide an initial surveillance of  
35 whether massage parlor women are in fact vulnerable to sexual and other forms of exploitation  
36 (as recommended by Chab Dai (Brammer & Smith-Brake, 2013, p. 76). This research focuses on  
37 the massage industry primarily to draw attention to the discrepancy between the vast  
38 establishment of massage parlors and potential availability of sexual services by massage  
39 workers, with the apparent lack of NGOs working with this particular group. The gap in support  
40 for such vulnerable women is proposed to be caused by the general demographics of the massage  
41 industry, which mainly comprises an adult workforce that is almost exclusively over 18 years  
42 old, and is thereby less susceptible to prioritization among the work of NGOs compared to  
43 children under 18 years old. Hence, this research sets out to address the concern that young and  
44 older women are still vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence beyond the age of 18.  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

When exploring the vulnerabilities of women working in the massage industry, it is important to make a distinction between women who do not offer any sexual services to clients and women who engage in sex work for either a limited time period or indefinitely. Cambodian women may be pushed by a number of factors into a context in which sexual exploitation is more likely to occur (Brammer & Smith-Brake, 2013, p. 30). Debt, poverty and lack of employment opportunities among others were all cited as heightening the likelihood of a woman's entry into sex work. Identifying poverty as a vulnerability factor can be misleading as it cannot be assumed that being poor will invariably lead to sexual exploitation within the massage industry. However in many cases poverty and debt comes hand-in-hand, with families falling deeper into poverty because of the large sums of money that they owe. A study investigating the migration and trafficking of women and girls in Cambodia for sexual exploitation found that 40% of Khmer women and girls credited their entry into commercial sex work to levels of debt incurred by their families (Brown, 2007; p. 9). Poverty is a common driving force behind many of the vulnerability factors experienced by masseuses, including, but not limited to, illness, educational attainment, and migration.

Factors relating to migration within a country often form the basis of counter- trafficking campaigns, as people are made vulnerable to sexual exploitation as a result of migration to a new city (Brown, 2007, p. 33). Migration research in Cambodia has previously focused on internal and external trafficking of people in Cambodia for sexual and labor exploitation (Maltoni, 2007, p. 3). However, in recent years it has become clear that a significant internal migration pull-factor is the garment industry. Providing over 250,000 primarily Phnom Penh-based jobs particularly for young women, this industry is the most effective rural to urban pull-factor in the country. This has led to further research regarding the vulnerability of these garment workers to exploitation, including sexual exploitation, both within and outside of the factories (Webber et al., 2010, p. 165). Phlong et al.'s study of entertainment workers found that a significant number of them initially moved to Phnom Penh in order to work in the garment industry but later moved to entertainment work because it was better paid (Phlong et al., 2012, p. 24). Whether similar trends exist for massage parlor workers in Phnom Penh is a point of interest for this study.

When it comes to abuse of sex workers, Maher et al. (2011) found that in Phnom Penh locations in which sex is sold mediates violence and police interaction. Furthermore, police attitudes have been found to frame their view of sex workers as vulnerable and easy targets for

1  
2  
3 abuse (Derks, 1997, p. 5) leading to many sex workers feeling threatened by police violence.  
4  
5 Furthermore, the illegal status of sex establishments has been found to exacerbate women's  
6  
7 vulnerability to police violence, often [meaning] that they exist in a corrupt and symbiotic  
8  
9 relationship with local authorities (Brown, 2007, p. 12). This issue represents a vulnerability to  
10  
11 exploitation, including sexual exploitation, experienced by sex workers in their day-to-day lives.  
12  
13 Phlong et al. s study found that as well as having experienced domestic violence as girls, female  
14  
15 entertainment workers were commonly faced with violence and harassment in their day-to-day  
16  
17 work, often from clients. Many of these women viewed sexual harassment as part of their job,  
18  
19 and would not even report instances of rape to the authorities as it was assumed that no legal help  
20  
21 would be offered to them (Phlong et al., 2012, p.27-28). The traditional expectations for respect  
22  
23 of elders coupled with a culture of shame, especially in regards to a family's public image, makes  
24  
25 it difficult to disclose instances of any sexual abuse, particularly if it is interfamilial (Hoefinger,  
26  
27 2013, p. 90).

28  
29 In combination, these vulnerabilities provide an alternative narrative to the older sex  
30  
31 workers in the entertainment industry. The narrative is that this work is far less voluntary than  
32  
33 many organisations have portrayed it to be. In the effort to distinguish between sex workers in  
34  
35 Cambodia that are forced into their position and those who freely choose it, a study was  
36  
37 conducted by Steinfatt (2003). His nationwide census of female sex workers working in direct  
38  
39 and indirect sectors of the industry produced an estimated 19,000 workers (as cited in Sandy,  
40  
41 2006, p. 456). Steinfatt's study concluded that around 20.2% of those women were trafficked,  
42  
43 supported by other studies that estimate that between 72.9- % of Cambodia s sex workers  
44  
45 voluntarily choose their work (Sandy, 2006, p. 456).

46  
47 Sandy (2006) pulled apart the idea that coerced versus voluntary entry into sex work is as  
48  
49 black and white as is often assumed. In a case study presented in her report, Sandy seeks to  
50  
51 personify the type of sex worker whose choice of work demands respect from those who might  
52  
53 label her as a victim of coercion. Linda's story, typical of many women in the sex industry, starts  
54  
55 with the birth of a child from an ex-husband. She had to provide for her child and mother, yet  
56  
57 had no skill training and very little education. Due to these circumstances, every job she sought  
58  
59 turned her away. Finally, Linda 'chose' to enter brothel-based sex work. The irony of her  
60  
situation is revealed, as her choice was the result of having nothing else to choose from. In light  
of this case study, the question raised by feminist activist MacKinnon is applicable: if

prostitution is a free choice, why are women with the fewest choices the ones most often found doing it (Lansink, 2004, p. 11)?

As Rylko-Bauer and Farmer (2016) explore in their study on structural violence and poverty, social problems are often more complex than the immediate factors at hand, and may in some cases even be defined as what Johan Galtung (1969) calls 'structural violence'. This refers to a state of societal structures or institutions that leads to the direct or indirect prevention of individuals or groups of people to meet their own needs or reaching their full potential as human beings. Generally, this type of violence results from an interplay of various social, cultural, political and economic factors.

Despite the large presence of non government organizations in Phnom Penh, the experiences of women working in the massage industry have largely remained unexplored to date. In order to identify and meet the needs of these masseuses appropriately and effectively, dialogues about their work and life situations need to be created and maintained. The study at hand aims to be a exploratory study into the lives and more specifically the vulnerability to sexual exploitation and other forms of abuse of Phnom Penh's female masseurs in the lower-priced massage parlors, (those charging under 4 USD per massage). As have previous studies in this series, this report uses a mixed quantitative- qualitative approach to assess the vulnerabilities and resilience of these women. Field research was conducted using semi-structured interviews in Khmer to explore the vulnerabilities regarding primarily sexual exploitation and/or sexual abuse as part of or as a result of their work and physical abuse. Other factors measured included family relationships, financial dependencies, sexually transmitted diseases, and self-worth. So the key question is, are female massage parlor workers in Phnom Penh vulnerable to sexual and/or other exploitation and/or abuse?

## Methodology

### Ethical Considerations

As there was no immediate governing body to provide ethical approval to conduct this study, the researchers adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined by Jewkes (2008) and Astbury (2012).

Prior to conducting the interviews, informed consent was obtained from participants, and right to

withdraw or not answer was clearly stated. If a participant expressed a desire for help of any kind they were given a Precious Women 1 business card with numbers to call if they wished to enquire about alternative employment, counselling, skills training, and more. This information was only offered if the women asked for it, seeing as the research was explained as not having an interventionist agenda. In addition, interviewers and researchers were sensitive to the safety of the participants; if a manager was present their permission was obtained, and if managers asked the interview to be stopped or the participant appeared to be in danger in any way then the interview was brought to an end. No images were taken during the research and anonymity of the interviewees as well as confidentiality of the data was ensured.

### Participants

A total of 112 female participants working in massage parlours throughout Phnom Penh, Cambodia, (n=112) were gathered for questionnaire-based interviews. Interviews were conducted in 10,000 Riel (US\$2.50), US\$3 and several US\$4 massage parlors in the Phnom Penh area, following mapping of roads and areas. The sampling method used was then convenience sampling: to be granted interviews the researchers would ask permission from a manager if they were in sight, as well as the masseurs themselves.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the interview, and were told they had the right not to respond or end the interview at any point. In some cases an interview was conducted over several sittings because the participant had to serve a client. Upon completion of the interview, the respondent was offered a US\$2 phone card as a token of gratitude. When more than one woman in the same parlor was willing to participate, several interviews would be conducted in the same location. All interviews were conducted over a period of three weeks during July 2014.

### Survey Instrument

The mixed method questionnaire used was adapted from and complemented previous related studies conducted with female KTV workers in Phnom Penh and male massage workers in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Sections covered in the survey were similar to these prior studies: demographics, entrance into the industry, finances, relationships, stigma and discrimination, personal sexual history, sexual experiences at work, sexual health, substance abuse, physical violence, work satisfaction, and existential well-being. The breadth of topics



covered in the interviews was surveyed using a mixture of open-ended (qualitative) and multiple-choice questions (quantitative), and interviewers were encouraged to note down any additional relevant quotes (see Appendix A).

Questionnaires in Khmer that had been translated from an initial English version of the survey were used. The interviews were conducted and recorded by a Khmer interviewer. A non-Khmer speaking researcher was also present to record relevant field notes and act as a reference for the Khmer interviewer should any questions arise.

**Limitations**

The report at hand is not a prevalence study but an exploratory study, so data collected should not be viewed as representative statistical data but rather an investigative qualitative study providing information on the lives of the women interviewed. Results found here cannot be generalized and are only applicable to the specific cases encountered in this study.

Although the research assistants asked questions in Khmer, the inability of the research observers to speak Khmer, made it difficult to effectively monitor the quality of data collected, for example for clarification or elaboration of an answer. Furthermore, nuances of answers given in Khmer may have been lost since after the translation of the answers into English was often simplified version of the initial answers given.

A major limiting factor was that the women were all interviewed in their place of work, often in the presence of other people. Their managers were often present and frequently stated at the beginning of the interview that no sexual services were permitted to be sold at their massage parlor, potentially placing pressure on participants to support this message within interviews. Interviewing the women in a private space proved difficult as the interviews were conducted during their working day, so the women were unable to leave the massage parlor. Where possible, chairs were pulled up away from other people and the interviewers were clear to ask people listening in to leave before sensitive questions were asked. Interviewers would lower their voices or change the order of questions to minimize the number of extra people listening in on interviews, generally being sensitive and responsive to the participants potential discomfort.

**Results**



The researchers analyzed the quantitative survey questions using SPSS 20.0 (SPSS Inc). Both descriptive and thematic analyses were utilised. Descriptive analyses were used to examine the frequencies of various responses. Thematic analysis was used to explore the responses to open-ended questions included in the survey, with key features of this data coded and sorted in a systematic manner to reflect patterns in the data and inform themes and subthemes relevant to the questions used in the survey (Boyatzis, 1998).

### **Demographics and Financial Implications**

Several pieces of demographic and financial information were recorded in this study, including: the participant's age; the age they began working at the massage parlour; time spent working at a massage parlour; weekly and quarterly income; and family debt. All income values include tips. Mean and ranges were recorded and can be observed in table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Demographics and Financial implications<sup>1</sup>.**

	Mean	Range
Age (Years)	27	18-52
Age that Participant started working at Massage Parlour (Years)	25	18-29
Income (n=71) per week (USD)	N/A*	\$2-300
Income (n=71) per three months (USD)	N/A*	\$1-100
Family Debt (USD)	N/A	\$1-550

The majority of participants (n=71) (82%) stated that they do not receive all of the money they earn, instead receiving a portion of their earnings. The most common amount received was 30% of the price of the massage, as stated by thirty-eight women (54%). The standard price of a massage in the massage parlors targeted was US\$2.50; therefore these respondents would receive US\$0.75 per massage. However, twenty women (28%) responded that they did not know what they had earned because the money was given directly to her manager.

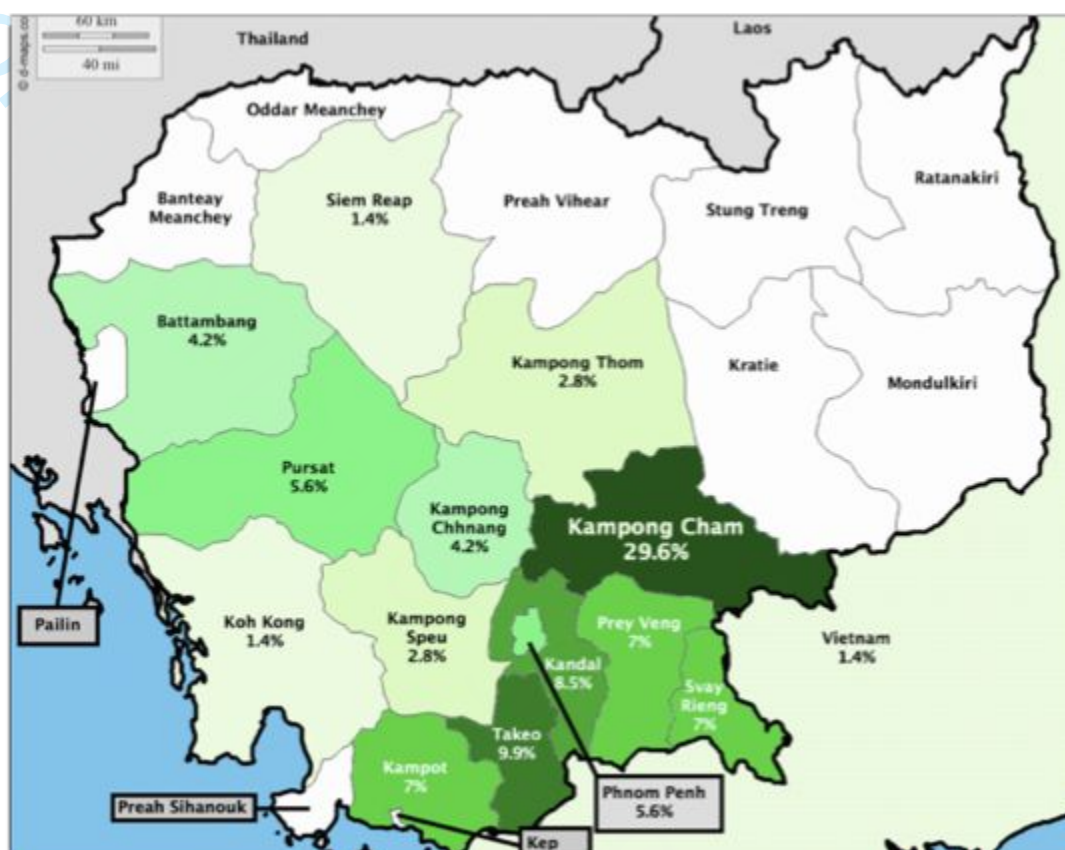
**Migration**

A majority of participants (93%) were not from Phnom Penh, with only (6%) stating they were from the city (see image 1). Many women (30%) came from the province of Kampong Cham, followed by Takeo being home to 10% of participants. A large proportion of women (30%) had only lived in Phnom Penh for less than a year, i.e. eleven months or less.

<sup>1</sup> \*The mean weekly and monthly income is not reported as 28% (n=20) and 42% (n=30) of participants, respectively, did not know their income which significantly impacted the quality of the results.

[Insert Fig 1.]

**Fig. 1. Location from which Participants came from**



Participants who had migrated to Phnom Penh had primarily moved in order to earn money (69%). The greatest proportion of participants (35%) came to work in the massage parlors because of a friend. This is followed closely by women finding the job themselves (twenty-three respondents or 32%). When asked why the participants entered the massage industry as opposed to other work, a total of 28% of participants cited economic benefits (good money, family poverty, free accommodation/food, paying off debt). However, 24% of participants entered this line of work for negative reasons. Specifically, 17% stated that they entered this work due to lack of choice. Four women cited physical limitations such as illness or disability as the primary reasons for entering this work as opposed to another job. In contrast, only 5% of participants stated that they considered working in the massage parlour to be a good job.

Seventeen participants (24%) had never worked prior to entering the massage industry. The remaining respondents had previously worked a large variety of jobs immediately prior to entering the massage industry, with a major proportion of the sample (39%) having worked in a

garment factory directly prior to their massage parlor job. Over half of participants (51%) had at some point worked in the garment industry, which appears to be a major pull-factor for young Cambodian women to move to the capital. The two primary reasons given for leaving the garment industry [n=36] were the need for greater income (13%) and becoming too sick to work in the factories (11%).

**Vulnerabilities**

**First sexual experience.**

The age of the participants first sexual experience (n=71) ranged from fifteen to twenty-six (mode 18 years old; 23%). The majority of participants had their first sexual experience with their husband (56%) and 11% experienced it with their boyfriend. Only four participants (6%) had their first sexual experience with a client and five (7%) with a stranger. Out of the participants (n=64), 82% reported their first sexual experience to have been wanted and consensual, whereas, six women (9%) said their first experience was unwanted and forced.

**Violence and sexual abuse.**

Sixty-three women (64%) [n=98] gave similar definitions of rape much like this response:

*“Rape to me means forcing someone to have sex”*

Almost half (48%) of participants [n=98] described consensual sex as a situation of mutual affection between both parties. Another 45% of participants described consensual sex as an agreement between all parties or a willingness to have intercourse with someone. Three participants included the possibility of consensual sex in the context of a commercial transaction involving an agreement between them and their clients. Just above 30% of the participants stated they were aware of what consensual sex is, while eight women mentioned having seen forced sex on TV or in the news. Over 70 participants said they had never been raped, leaving over a quarter (27%) of all participants that had been raped at least once in their lives. Ten participants (14%) reported experiencing physical violence by an intimate partner or husband in the past 12 months.

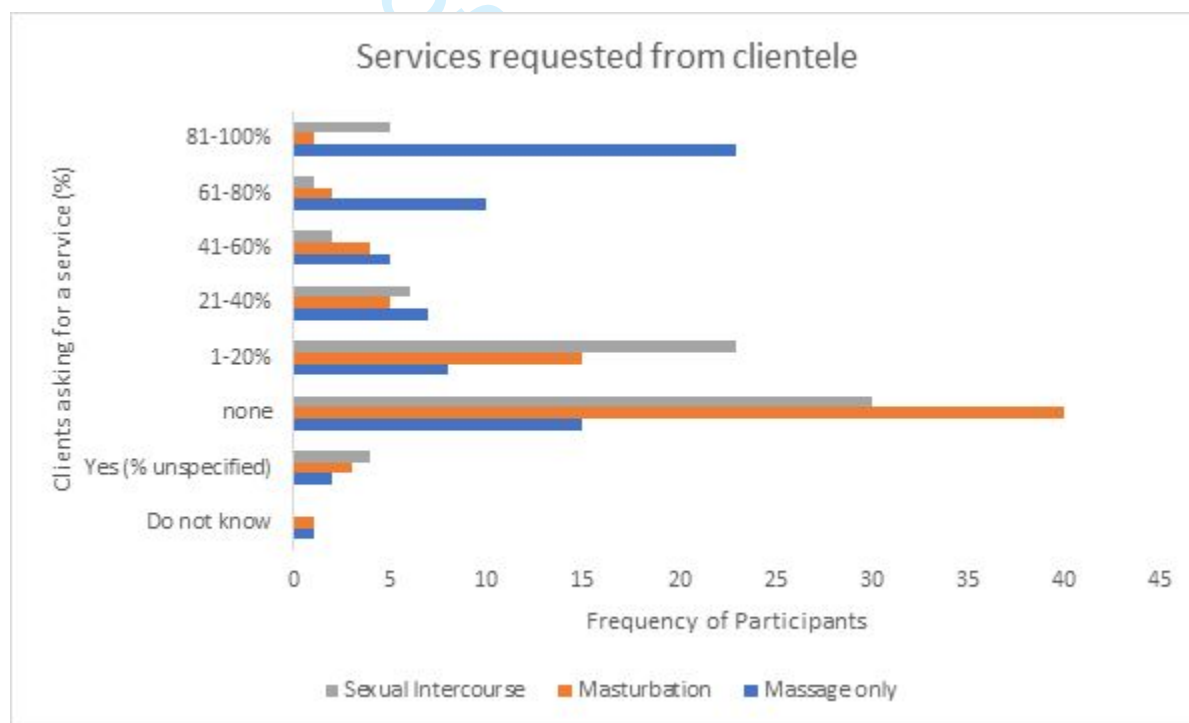
**Vulnerabilities experiences at work.**

### *Clientele.*

Over one third (34%) of all participants were found to have less than fifty clients per month. Ten participants had 150 or more clients, with one woman having three hundred clients. The age range of clients was found to be between sixteen and eighty-seven years of age. It was also found that over a quarter of participants (28%), of those who answered the question (n=71), had sex with foreign clients. This is surprisingly high considering that most of the services for foreigners are higher priced and located in specific geographical areas away from the lower price market that this survey targeted.

### *Services required by clients.*

Services required by participants such as massage, masturbation, and sexual intercourse were recorded. From the frequencies they gave compared with the number of clients they had per month, percentages were calculated (see graph 1).



**Graph 1:** Frequency of services requested by clients<sup>2</sup>.

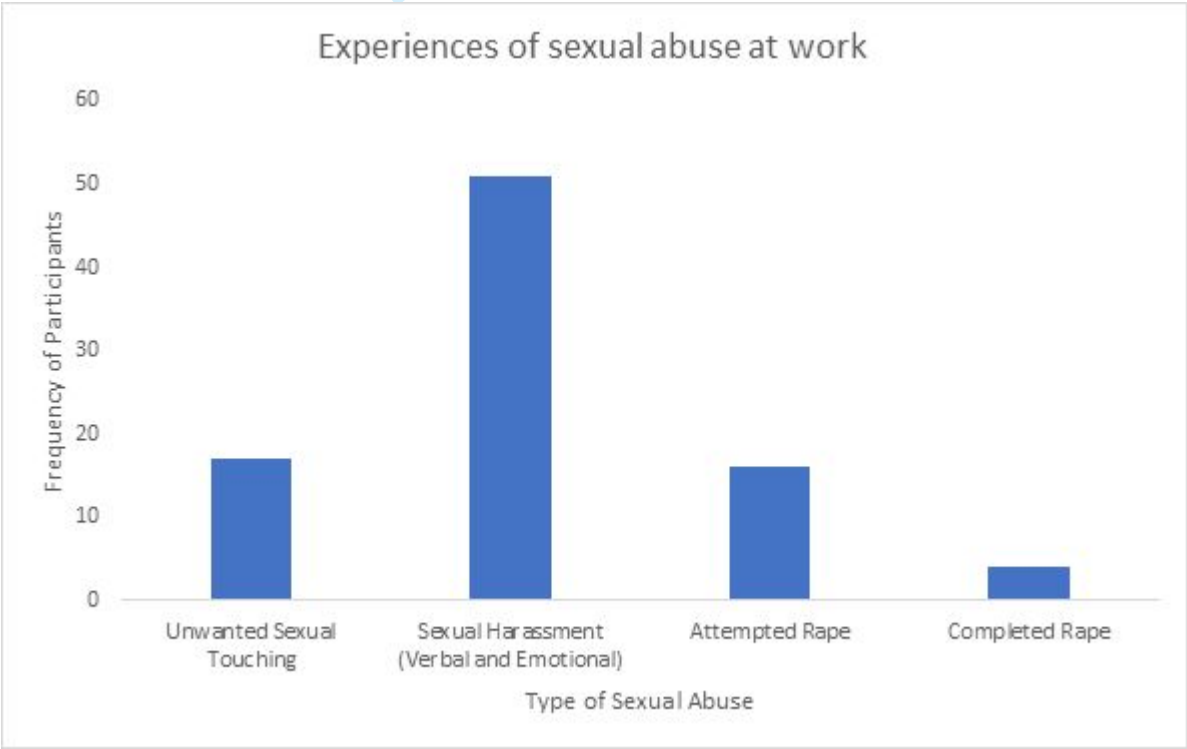
<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that results indicating the frequency of participants that were asked to perform/receive oral sex as not been reported due to the high frequency of confused responses, particularly regarding the differences between giving and receiving oral sex.

*Physical violence.*

Fourteen participants claimed to have experienced physical violence as a result of their work, six said that they were subject to physical violence often, with four identifying their experiences as occurring only once. Another four participants said they experienced physical violence a few times. Six of the participants who had experienced physical violence [n=14] said that clients perpetrated the violence, followed by husbands (two participants), and police (two participants). Co-workers, family members, and boyfriends were each cited as perpetrators of violence by one participants each.

*Sexual abuse.*

The frequency of participants (n=109) who had experienced different types of sexual abuse over the last three months was recorded (see graph 2).



**Graph 2:** Frequency of participants that experienced different types of sexual abuse at work.

When the participants were asked who sexually harassed them, clients were the most common response (cited 36 times), followed by police (cited 5 times), co- workers (cited twice), and finally one participants saying it was their friend. One participants also said that everyone

sexually harassed her.

### **Stigma and Discrimination**

Thirty-seven women (52%) stated that they had experienced stigma or discrimination as a direct result of their work and 34 participants (48%) said they had not. It was found that 21 participants (30%) identified their clients as the top perpetrators. Fourteen (20%) said friends, nine (13%) identified their neighbors, five (7%) identified police, and two (3%) said family were top perpetrators of stigma. Only one participant said her co-workers stigmatized or discriminated against her.

### **Work Satisfaction**

When asked whether participants liked their current job (n=98), forty participants (41%) answered affirmatively, while forty-nine participants (50%) did not like their job. Of the remaining nine women, five (5%) liked their job "sometimes", and four (4%) did not provide an answer.

When asked to elaborate on their affinity to their job (n=40), 11 participants (28%) stated that they liked their job because of its overall easiness or lack of physical strain. A further 11 (28%) also cited the higher pay in comparison to alternative jobs. Four participants (10%) were satisfied with their job due to the freedom or independence it offered them. However, six participants (15%) made additional implications that this job was their only option.

The 49 participants who expressed dislike towards massage work were also asked to give reasons why. In their responses, one in five participants (20%) underscored prejudice and discrimination yet again as the primary reason for disliking their job. A further 20% of participants who did not like their jobs indicated an absence of alternatives in choosing their work. Still others were dissatisfied with their work due to problems with clients (6%), threats to physical health (6%), and embarrassment from family knowing about their work (6%). Two participants expressed that massage work damages their hopes for a future.

### **Job Recommendation**

After having been asked whether or not they would recommend their job to a sister or friend, a vast majority (90%) of participants said they would not. The most cited reasons for not referring a friend to this line of work were: thinking it is not a good job (22%), not wanting others to



undergo adverse experiences (20%), and being afraid of others knowing where they work (19%).

The remaining 11 participants (10%) who said they would recommend this job to a sister or friend gave reasons that did not necessarily portray their job in a positive light. Six participants would recommend the job if they felt their friend or sister had no other options or were too poor. Two participants said they would recommend the job because it was "easy" or "good". In contrast, one of these participants stated this despite experiencing sexual and physical violence at work as well as providing sexual services.

**Well-being**

**Self worth.**

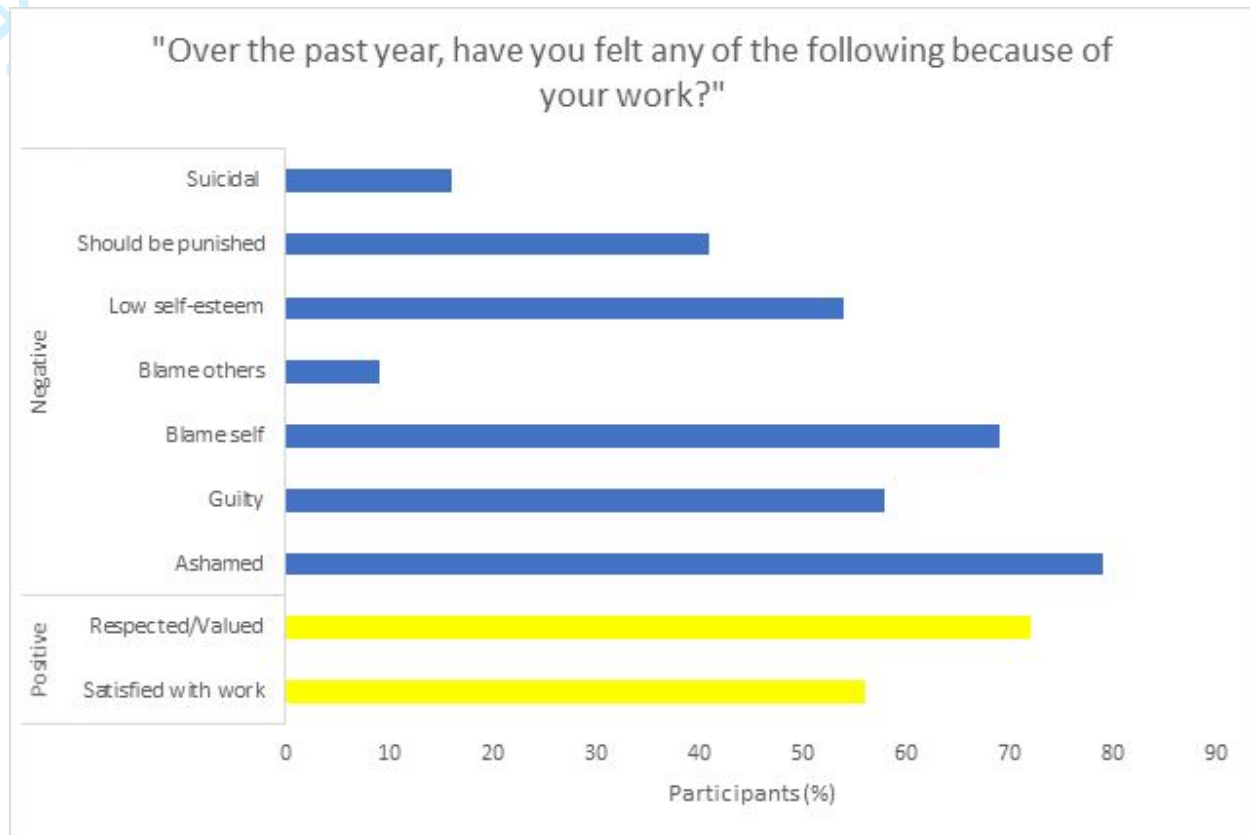
Results demonstrated that one third of participants (33%) indicated that they had direct control over their sense of value or confidence. Over half (56%) of these participants (n=32) believed that being self-confident and loving themselves could increase their value, while some others would engage in 'good behavior' (31%). Eight participants from this group emphasized working hard or striving more in life would increase their sense of value.

In contrast, 41 participants (42%) posited external factors as fundamental to increase self-worth. Of these participants (n=41), 46% implicated money in increasing their sense of value, which complements the finding that 43% of women felt that a lack of money was their greatest current obstacle. Moreover, 13 participants (31%) specified leaving the massage parlor and changing their job as a way to find greater worth. Two participants similarly felt that a change in their environment was crucial to increasing their value, but preferred further study or receiving an education rather than alternative employment. Twelve participants did not know how to increase their sense of value or self-confidence and five chose not to provide a response.

**Emotional Susceptibilities.**

To assess their emotional wellbeing in relation to their line of work, participants were asked to affirm or negate a series of statements that probed for nine specific feelings that they may have had in the past twelve months. Two of the nine feelings were positive, while the remaining seven implied negative emotional states (see graph 3). It is important to note that each of these feelings

were probed for by the interviewers, rather than suggested by the participants themselves

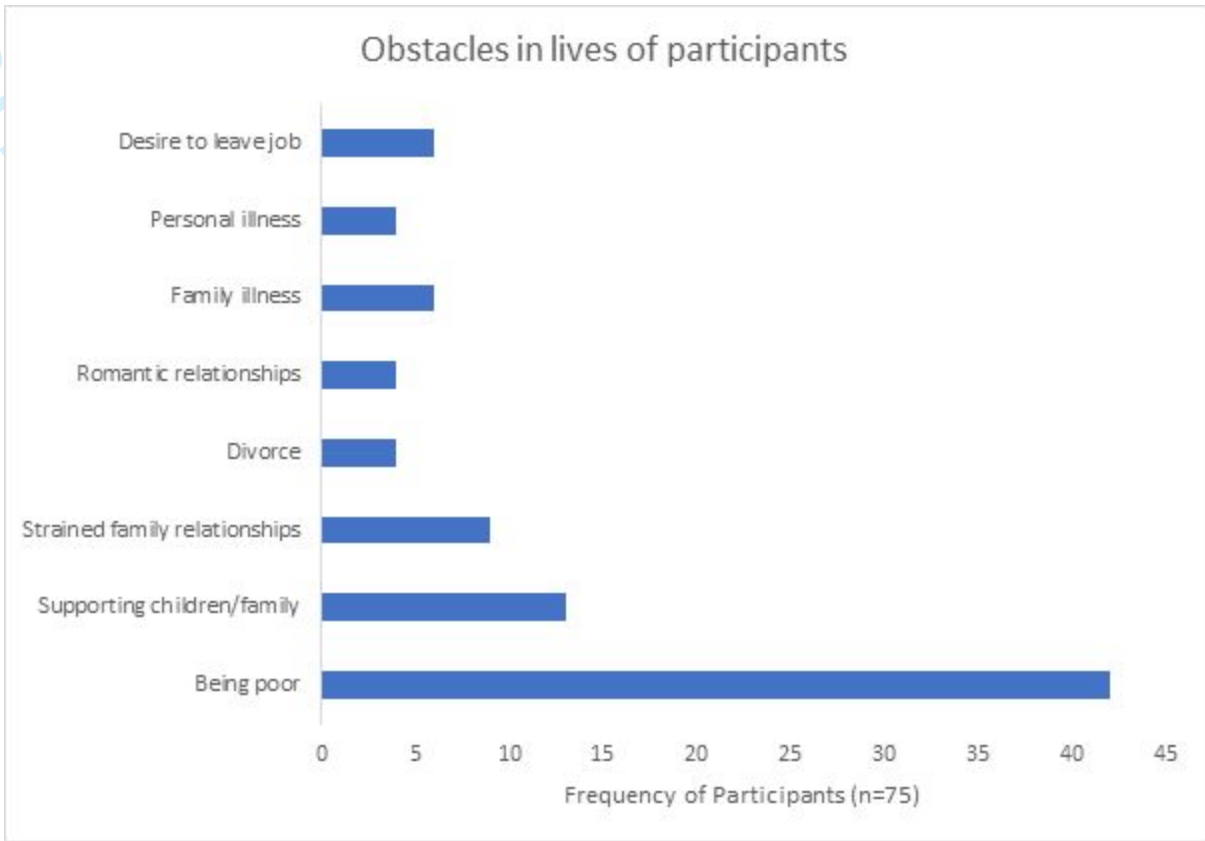


**Graph 3:** Percentage of participant's experiences of negative and positive feelings about work.

Out of these participants ( $n=71$ ), the largest proportion expressed that they experienced the emotion of shame. Overall, these results delineate both the emotional vulnerabilities and resiliencies of female massage workers.

### **Obstacles and ways to overcome them.**

When asked what their biggest obstacles in life were, seventy-five participants [ $n=98$ ] cited having a large variety of obstacles. Only six participants said they faced no obstacles in life, or had already overcome those they had previously experienced. The remaining 17 participants chose not to respond. Participants answers were recorded and presented (see graph 4).



**Graph 4:** Frequency of perceived obstacles faced by Participants during their lives

Encouragingly, of the 75 women who told interviewers that they had obstacles, 81% (n=61) felt that there were ways to overcome these problems. Only one participant explicitly said there was nothing she could do to overcome her obstacles and seven participants did not know how to overcome these problems.

**Qualitative Results: Advice to those considering becoming a masseur**

The participants advice to girls or women considering entering the massage work can be grouped into four overall themes. The most frequent message (21 participants) had a very simple and clear message that is represented in the following quote by one respondent:

*“Do not come to work here, people around us do not value us. Please find another job instead.”*

The second theme, cited by 12 participants, revolves around how to conduct oneself within the massage work. Most of the advice given in this category includes making sure to

protect oneself from HIV as well as to protect oneself when having sex with clients.

*"I want them to know how to protect themselves from HIV when they have sex with clients."*

The third category of advice pertains to general life advice. More specifically, it included four areas of advice:

1. Valuing themselves and their work (15 participants):

*"Every work is valuable, it depends on us. So we are the ones who make ourselves valuable, we help ourselves."*

2. To stop trusting men (eight participants):

*"I have to endure no matter what. Get up and stop trusting men from now on. Although men hurt you, you have to get up."*

3. To strive for good education and specific skills (six participants):

*"If I would give advice, I would advise that they should learn specific skills. As long as we have our own skill no one can look down on us."*

4. And finally, to stay away from drugs (ten participants):

*"I want to share my idea to every girl and boy, go away from drugs."*

Clearly the collection of responses here provides an illustration into the obstacles these women and provides a basis for NGO's, unions and government organisations to address the vulnerabilities of massage workers.

## Discussion

This study overall has revealed critical vulnerabilities and needs that have not been addressed in previous academic work. This includes, but is not limited to, vulnerabilities to; sexual and physical violence; sexual exploitation and harassment; entrance into the massage industry; sex work; and finally the degree of choice these women have when entering this industry. As will be shown below, in order to comprehensively answer the question whether women in the massage industry are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, one has to look beyond perpetrators and situations at hand and take a broader view of the factors and circumstances leading these women

into such precarious situations. In fact, the results of this study suggest that much of the abuse that the women encounter are part of what Johan Galtung labels ‘structural violence’ as will be elaborated on below (Galtung, 1969).

This section of the report will elaborate on the implications of the findings found in this study, as well as providing recommendations to non-government organisations (NGOs), government organisations, and faith based groups as to how these vulnerabilities could be addressed.

**Vulnerabilities**

Irrespective of whether participants offered sexual services to clients or not, many women in this study experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and harassment. Out of all of the participants in this study, 23% of participants chose to tell us that they had experienced attempted rape in the past three months and 6% had experienced actual rape in the past three months. Due to the nature of questions surrounding such extreme sexual violence and the association with shame, these numbers are likely conservative. However, this data implies that massage parlor workers are at a significant risk of rape as a direct result of their work.

Stigma and discrimination associated with massage parlor work due to its presumed association with sex work makes women more vulnerable to sexual violence and physical violence. For example, clients often assume that massage workers offer sexual services and may rape or sexually harass women who decline to service them. However, those who do offer sexual services are still equally vulnerable to sexual violence and physical abuse as well.

This is exemplified by the results that show that massage parlor women seem to be at high risk of physical violence from clients and police (who often are clients), experiencing verbal threats, physical bodily violence, and even use of weapons, including guns, by clients and police. Vulnerability to police violence in particular seems to be a problem, possibly due to the illegality of sex work, so massage parlor workers who offer sexual services - and even those who do not - are at risk of sexual abuse by policemen who do not respect or recognize the rights of these women. For example one respondent exemplified this in the following statement,

*“A lot of police tried to rape me but only 20 had sex with me.”*

**Entrance to Sex Work: Vulnerability to Sexual Exploitation**

From this preliminary study, poverty seems to indicate an increase in the likelihood of obtaining

work in the massage industry. For many women, offering clients sexual services was a short-term financial solution. It was not directly exploitative in so far as the transactions that occurred were mutually agreed upon and followed through. However, massage parlor workers who did offer sexual services are vulnerable to sexual exploitation by managers who would profit from their sexual services. For example, in some establishments women could offer sexual services if they then paid the manager. In one instance, a participant in this study cited having to pay \$2.50 to their boss per hour they were providing sexual services with a client.

Some women in this study that offered sexual services to customers felt they were sexually exploited in terms of not being paid or not being paid enough for providing sexual services. This not only happened to many respondents in this study, but also seemed to be a well-known risk for any women offering sexual services within this line of work. Some participants also shared that managers financially exploited them in their day-to-day massage work in terms of salaries being withheld. Some clients had their pay cut or held for a few weeks up to as long as seven months.

### **Factors which Increase Likelihood of Entering Massage Industry**

Most of the participants' families in this research (80%) were dependent on participants to send money back and 48% families owed some sort of debt, creating cycles of poverty and debt which make it necessary for women to work and send money home. This is linked to the cultural factor of filial duty as daughters towards both immediate and extended family, as well as responsibility as a mother to provide for their own children.

Filial duty also increases likelihood of moving from rural provinces to urban centers in search for jobs, which may contribute to why so many participants had migrated to Phnom Penh. Massage parlor work was not the job which many women migrated to Phnom Penh to get. Instead many participants had initially moved to Phnom Penh in order to work in the garment industry, which is the single greatest rural to urban pull factors for internal migration in Cambodia, providing 250,000 primarily Phnom Penh based jobs mainly for young women (Maltoni, 2007). Working in garment factories seems to increase the likelihood of entering the massage industry, since over half of participants used to work in the garment industry. Factors that contribute to why participants left factory work include low pay and the exploitative and physically demanding nature of factory work. In regards to why they may choose to

subsequently enter massage parlor work include that the massage parlors provide childcare, better pay, more freedom, easier work, and generally better working conditions, according to participants of this study.

Job opportunities are further limited by illness or disability, which is also a reason given by respondents for choosing massage work over other forms of employment which may be more physically demanding. Illness is also a reason why women may lose jobs, for example this was the second most common reason given by respondents for leaving their garment industry job, and thereafter enter the massage industry. Family breakdown, heartbreak and divorce cropped up as key reasons for migrating to Phnom Penh in need of work and money. Some participants referred to these as reasons why they chose massage work over other forms of employment, potentially because of the community and familial structure which massage parlors can offer women through living and working together with co- workers and managers.

**Dependency, Relationships and Identity**

The dynamic interactions between many of the massage parlor women depicted a structure of kinship similar to the tight-knit homosocial ties discussed in Hoefinger (2011). Migrating to the city of Phnom Penh from their home province was seen to be correlated to a rift in the participants familial networks, either in terms of their migration pulling them away from their family ties or preexisting family issues pushing them away to the city. The relationships built between massage parlor women could provide a supplementary source of belonging and understanding to those who live apart from their families. This could be a factor that explains why despite many feeling much shame over the past year (79%), approximately an equal amount (72%) also felt respected and valued during the same period of time.

The portion of these women who flee to the urban centers in search of a job in the massage industry may subsequently be entering into semi-parental relationships with their managers and older female co-workers. Coupled with the presence of dependent relatives for whom a woman is financially responsible for (Derks, 1997), such circumstances could only compound her risk of being exploited. Regarding the extent to which female massage workers depend on their massage establishment, results clearly demonstrated the participants total earnings do not appear to be sufficient so as to offer the flexibility of entering an alternative job industry with better working conditions. The fact that more than 40% of participants did not



know their own incomes in the three months prior to their interviews may suggest the transience of their wages.

### **Family relationships**

As has already been discussed, traditional obligations to the family still exert a great influence among many of the massage workers. However, economic sustenance is not the only dynamic at play between women and their families. The effects of negative family relationships on daughters, mothers and wives are equally important to acknowledge. Stemming from the discussion of entry factors into the massage industry, many of the participants left their hometowns to work in any job that would allow them to escape from personal conflicts at home. Thus, justification underlying their dependency on their job could involve the interplay between the entry factors of filial duty and escape from conflicts in the family or intimate partner relationships.

The mechanisms that bind female massage workers into a state of dependency may only heighten their vulnerability to exploitation. Researchers describe dependency as a structure that "works to trap and constrict rather than to liberate" (Peck, 1978, p.105). It would be important for future research to draw links between the health of a massage worker's relationship to her family of origin and how equipped she is to gain independence from her household. Whether her household is a source of confidence or self-worth for a woman who is seeking to make her own sustainable living in an independent manner, could possibly be what separates those who become enraptured in a cycle of dependency on their massage establishment, and those who enter a process of liberation from such cycles. This would require further research in the form of an in-depth qualitative study.

### **Identity and Self-worth**

The emotional susceptibilities of the participants point to both short- term and long-term effects of working in the massage industry in Phnom Penh. For many, the stigma, prejudice and discrimination attached to their line of work pose a threat to the believed identity of these women and are damaging to their sense of value. Still, some displayed no sign that these challenges wounded their self-confidence.

After asking for ways to improve self-confidence or sense of value, there was found to be an imbalance in the dichotomy between intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors

encompassed anything belonging inherently to the participant's sense of self, upon which she herself exerted control to increase her confidence. Whereas, external factors were implied to be beyond the participant's control, such as increasing financial status or changing to a different job. The results demonstrated a stronger external locus of control over self-confidence among the group as a whole. By contrast, it is still striking in the extent to which women believed in personal agency as a means to changing their sense of value, rather than believing that factors beyond their control were paramount to deciding their worth. Emphasis on self-empowerment was also evident in participants' suggestions for advice to other girls considering work in the massage industry as many of the participants insisted on the importance of learning to value oneself and improve one's own life.

The proportion of those who felt they should be punished (41%) as well as a disquieting number who felt suicidal in the year prior (16%) help to underscore the existence of a shattered identity among many of these women. This is a stark reminder of how a broken image of the self is not something that can be easily dispelled. It is important to note, however, that the data collected does not provide evidence that these emotional conditions were caused primarily by sexual exploitation related to their work.

### **Discrimination and Stigma**

After analyzing the data, it was clear that a major aspect in the lives of massage parlor workers is the discrimination and stigma that they face. While this may be expected when considering the perceptions of massage parlor women that exist, the roots and perpetuation of this discrimination should be examined.

When directly asked whether they faced stigma and discrimination because of their work, a little over half of participants (52%) answered affirmatively. Twenty percent of the sample cited discrimination against them as the reason why they dislike their job. A little over 60% of participants admitting that their clients request sexual intercourse, it may not be surprising that these women face the daily discrimination that is often directed towards sex workers. The most frequent perpetrators of this stigma are the clients, the people that massage parlor women interact with most in a day. *Chbap Srei*, the code of conduct that often dictates the expected behavior from women in Cambodian society, is exemplified in the treatment of massage parlor women through the expectations from their clients. Women are often expected to submit willfully to the

desires and will of men, a standard that is seen in the massage industry. Yet it is the massage workers who carry the burden of stigma for it.

Our sample reveals that while many women are vulnerable to exploitation, dissatisfied with their jobs, and engage in sex work, there are also women working within the massage parlor industry who do not fall into these categories. Some of the women interviewed found massage parlors to work where they are safer from being sexually exploited. Several parlors visited had the beds set up all together in the main room, making it impossible for clients to request any services other than massage. While these cases were the minority, they shed light on the fact that not all women working in the massage industry are subject to engaging in sex work. For some, the job simply entails massage.

However, for many women encountered, work in the massage parlors includes more than just their work. They find a new social support system, livelihood, and a new opportunity to provide for themselves and their families. Fairly enough, these women often ask that they not be discriminated against because of their occupation, even if it is a stigmatized one. For the women who do not engage in sex work, discrimination against them is based on a false assumption that massage work always involves sex work. Greater understanding about the circumstances which lead women to engage in sex work, such as the pressure to financially provide for the families and economic desperation needs to be understood. A quote from one participant serves as a constant reminder that even these women are undeserving of stigma:

*“No girl wants this job. Do not look down on us.”*

### **The Question of Choice**

The questionnaire on which the report is based does not include an explicit question about the voluntarism of the work some of the female masseurs do. However, responses given throughout the interview by several interviewees point to interesting insights into this topic.

The issue of voluntarism, on the one hand, entails the women's own choice to working at a massage place in the first place. One of the questions that was asked in order to learn more about the entry factors that lead young women into working in the massage industry, was why the participants chose this job as opposed to another job. This being an open question, no probing for answers was done. Nevertheless, 17% of the participants gave the same answer, stating that they have not had a choice other than to accept this job. Since they did not, however, further

specify in which way they have felt pressured to enter the massage industry, be it for financial pressures, the involvement of another person who forced them, or other reasons, this remains open for further investigation.

It must not, however, be concluded from this that many of the women work in the massage industry as a result from trafficking, or even just recruiting. The result section of this report clearly states, when asked how they came into this type of work, most participants answered to have been referred this job by a friend or that they have found it by themselves. What these findings suggest is that the majority of women did indeed enter into the massage work on voluntary terms in so far that they were not coerced by another person. The questions about the women's financial situation, however, point to the fact that economic or social structures may lead to pressures that make them accept a job that they would otherwise not agree to doing.

On the other hand, the question of choice also entails whether or not the women working in the massage industry offer sexual services do so voluntarily or not. Without having been asked for it, 14 out of 98 participants mentioned that they had not been aware to be required to do sex work as part of their job at the massage parlor prior to their entry into this line of work. There are, however, also a number of cases in which the women were not required or even requested to offer sexual services but chose to do so for various reasons. The relatively easy access to clients that are willing to pay for sex, as well as seeing their peers, who do sex work earning considerably more than a normal masseuse, as well as poverty and financial burden, are all structural factors facilitating a decision towards entering the sex industry. As shown above, many of the women entered sex work due to financial burdens and a lack of other job options which very much in line with Sandy (2006).

When relating the findings of this study to the Continuum Volition model (MoYES, 2012), most of the cases encountered here would fall into the category of economically driven sex which lies in between voluntary and coerced sex. Examining these cases in more detail, however, reveals that the women choosing to offer sexual services to their clients do so because they do not see another way of making financial ends meet. This calls into question whether economically driven sex can indeed be seen as less coercive than what the model calls coerced sex; if pressures, caused by socio-economic structures in these women's lives, lead to existential

1  
2  
3 fear of not being able to provide for themselves and/or their children, does this fundamentally  
4 differ from fear of physical harm?  
5  
6

7 What can be concluded from the data gathered for the purpose of this report is that each  
8 of the women interviewed has her own personal story and factors contributing to her current  
9 situation and each of them has a different stance on the work she does and her life as a whole. It  
10 is therefore crucial, not only from the authors perspective but also as mentioned from the women  
11 themselves, that women working in the massage industry are not being grouped into one  
12 homogenous group that needs a one-fits-all solution.  
13  
14  
15  
16

### 17 **Exploitation, Abuse, or Structural Violence?**

18  
19  
20 In order to answer the question as to whether women in the massage industry are vulnerable to  
21 sexual and other forms of exploitation or abuse, one has to distinguish between the former and  
22 the latter.  
23  
24

25 Some degree of exploitation both sexual as well as other forms are clearly present when it comes  
26 to withholding of wages, or salaries so small as to make an exit out of the job impossible. The  
27 relationship between the masseuses and the managers in particular would have to be investigated  
28 further in-depth in order to conclusively state whether dependencies are purposely created or  
29 sexual services provided by coercion or by agreement. However, as the definition of exploitation  
30 clearly states commercial sex acts in themselves as well as profiting from prostitution as forms of  
31 exploitation, vulnerability to both sexual as well as other exploitation in the massage industry  
32 cannot be denied. Much more prevalent, however, seems to be the existence and therefore  
33 vulnerability to abuse: be it sexual or physical violence perpetrated by clients, the police, or  
34 partners, or broader forms of abuse such as stigmatization, discrimination, harassment and  
35 threats.  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44

45 Both of these, however, seem indicative of a much broader form of suffering that these women  
46 are faced with: As mentioned above, the theory on 'structural violence' (Gultang, 1969) suggests  
47 that whenever a human being is limited in the realization of his or her individual potential by  
48 directly or indirectly being prevented from it by various social, economic, cultural or other  
49 structures, a form of violence against that person is present. What the results at hand show is that  
50 beyond the personal violence that many of the women working in massage parlors in Phnom  
51 Penh experience, the stigma, discrimination, separation from their families, fear of telling people  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

back home where they work, as well as their choice to offer sexual services e.g. to provide for a sick child or aging parents can all be seen as a sort of violence that results from a number of structural social, economic, and cultural factors including the lack of employment in the countryside, lack of skilled training (for women), the apparently fairly common practice of accumulating debt which appear to be very difficult to be paid off, poor working conditions e.g. in the garment factories driving women away from those jobs, the general perception of massage places as places where sexual services are solicited and the corresponding expectations by clients as well as the discrimination of massage parlor workers by the wider public. All these can be summarized into factors that lead women into a position where they experience hardships and different types of abuse and violence. Therefore, in order to fight this kind of violence, a number of factors will have to be addressed beyond the immediate and direct assistance that might be offered to women working in massage parlors.

### **Recommendations and implications for policy, research and practice**

This section of the report seeks to provide recommendations to different groups that can effectively utilise this information to aid these women to decrease stigma and discrimination against them.

#### **NGOs**

The messages that the participants in this sample would like to send to the NGO community and the Royal Cambodian Government can broadly be grouped into two different realms. The first key message, which was reflected in about 25% of the respondents answers, is an expression of appreciation that an NGO (Love 146) was interested in their situation. Secondly, there were numerous requests made towards the NGO community and government for support in the following areas: health related issues and sexual education, alternative employment and skills training, as well as help for their respective family situations. Finally, a recurring message was an appeal to end discrimination and stigma against them.

Working with massage parlor women highlighted their current invisibility to the NGO community, not only in terms of a lack of research, but also in terms of relationships being built with this group of people. Phnom Penh is saturated with NGOs many of which focus on vulnerable women, however there is no group which specifically works with massage parlor



workers. Building relationships with these women would help to build a clearer picture of their vulnerabilities and needs.

NGOs that do wish to work with this group of women, especially those who want to exit the massage industry, should consider the development of skills training and job creation for unskilled labor. Part of the cycle of dependency created by massage parlors which may prevent some women from feeling able to leave their jobs, is that massage parlors often provide accommodation and food for employees, as well as close communities of co-workers and managers which act as familial networks. These must all be carefully considered in efforts to work with women who want to leave the massage industry, for example that could be in the form of providing basic life-skills training, or in providing a similar structure of shared accommodation. Additionally, it should be noted that for many of these women leaving the massage parlors or any paid employment is not an option because they work to provide for their parents, children and themselves, and may have debts to pay off, therefore immediate employment or a way for them to earn whilst being trained in new skills would provide them with the option of leaving.

Working with women within massage parlors, and not just those who leave, is a key recommendation concluded from the variety of vulnerabilities and experiences found in this study. Working with managers may prove key to reducing the vulnerabilities of women to physical violence, sexual harassment, unwanted sexual touching, and rape within the workplace, as some managers already imposed open-door policies, and expressed the desire to protect their employees from these things. With managers who were willing to work with NGOs, creative strategies to protect women could be beneficial, for example creating posters to put on the walls of the massage parlors stating phone numbers women can call if they experience violence or sexual abuse, or even installing cameras to prevent abuse of employees, as was policy in one establishment that we visited. Because a majority of participants in this study indicated that they *do not like their job* in a massage parlor due to factors such as discrimination, risk of violence, and lack of choices, the researchers propose a first response be to prevent women from entering this line of work at all. The cycle of discrimination and stigma faced by 52% of participants, in addition to their often low self esteem and rifts with family, place the study's participants in a vulnerable position of entering a cycle they may not be able to easily break out of. Thus, the researchers believe that preventing the initial entry into the massage parlor industry may prove



most effective at reducing exposure to violence and abuse. Results from this research would strongly suggest that NGOs and government campaigns focus time and resources on rural, provincial education and job creation, especially for women and girls.

Campaigns are needed not only to promote the rights of women so that men understand consent of sex, but also to end stigma, discrimination, and stereotypes of all sex workers including massage parlor women as it could prove instrumental in reducing the expectations of clients and wider society that these women are required/forced into providing sexual services, thereby greatly increasing their vulnerability to unwanted sexual touching, harassment and violence from clients. Police training and accountability systems may also be implemented as the abuse of sex workers by them has been a well-documented phenomenon in Cambodia. Furthermore, campaigns to end these stereotypes would hopefully let these women live with less day-to-day discrimination in light of reduced stigma against them from being automatically labelled a sex worker, and for those that do provide sexual services to clients, campaigns which end stereotypes of them being labelled as bad women would hopefully also allow them to live free from such constant stigma. Stigma and discrimination faced by this group of women is perpetuated by labels attributed to them even by the NGO community, but can be ended with further research and through building relationships with individuals.

**Collaboration between NGOs and sex workers union**

Collaboration between NGOs, women’s rights organisations and the sex workers union is recommended in future work with massage parlor workers. Though such a collaboration may seem controversial and possibly unprecedented, it is vital in considering this recommendation to highlight the many goals and values held in common. This includes the belief that people should not be discriminated against for doing sex work, that no one should experience sexual violence, harassment or rape, that sex should be consensual, and that people who offer sexual services should not be at risk of physical violence. Massage parlor women’s vulnerability to such abuses could be aided by promoting the rights of women.

Furthermore, extensive sexual education campaigns would aid this purpose which go beyond HIV awareness, and instead deal with issues of male sexual entitlement, what consent and rape actually mean in real-world contexts, the illegality of unwanted sexual contact, and sexual harassment. These are only a few of a numerous creative campaigns which could reach a

1  
2  
3 further audience, and potentially be more inclusive and effective if created through a  
4 collaboration of NGOs and sex workers union groups, both of which hold the rights and  
5 protection of vulnerabilities of these women to be far more important than differences which  
6 they may have in other areas.  
7  
8  
9

## 10 11 12 **Conclusion and Further Research** 13

14 The current research sheds light on the vulnerabilities of women in the massage industry,  
15 whose needs have gone unaddressed in part due to their age. If the majority of NGOs working  
16 against sexual exploitation are mainly or solely focused on girls under 18 years of age, who are  
17 seen as more vulnerable, it is highly possible that the work of the NGO community is excluding  
18 the older demographic of women who remain vulnerable and have needs that should not be  
19 overlooked as a result of their age.  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24

25 As to the key question of this paper, the findings at hand suggest that women working in  
26 massage parlors in Phnom Penh are indeed vulnerable to both sexual as well as other forms of  
27 abuse, at times even perpetrated by those whose responsibility it would be to protect them, such  
28 as the police. In terms of direct violence experienced by these women, apart from direct physical  
29 abuse, mental abuse in form of stigma and discrimination seem to be a major contributing factor  
30 to these women's affliction. When looking at the larger picture, however, the women can clearly  
31 be stated to be suffering from structural violence as a result of the many interwoven and partly  
32 interdependent factors leading them to work in such an establishment and under such conditions  
33 at all. With regard to sexual or other forms of exploitation, some information gathered such as  
34 the often very small pay as well as seemingly interdependent relationships between masseuses  
35 and managers suggest that a form of exploitation might be present in some massage parlors. In  
36 order to determine this with more certainty, however, further in-depth research will have to be  
37 conducted, in particular focusing on the interdependency in massage parlors, exit options for  
38 massage parlor workers, and the nature of the agreement between masseuses and managers  
39 regarding the provision of sexual services.  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

51 Though this research provides insight into the lives of a number of massage parlor  
52 women throughout Phnom Penh, it merely serves as an initial investigative study, thus, further  
53 research on a larger scale is recommended. It is recommended that thorough prevalence studies  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

of massage parlors in Phnom Penh are conducted to investigate how many of these provide sexual services. Research investigating the managers themselves as well as their relationship and possible influence over the women working as masseuses is also recommended as it may prove instrumental in forming strategies to help women within massage parlors and would provide insight into the structure of these establishments.

In addition, further investigation into the cycles of dependency fostered within massage parlors is recommended to better equip NGOs and other organizations that want to work with these women. Further research into the trajectory of the lives of the women is recommended, as many participants alluded to their present employment being temporary, whilst planning to move on within two years. Whether or not this happens would give a tangible indication of the degree of self-empowerment and agency which these women actually possess. Additionally, further research into the backgrounds of women working in the massage industry is recommended to see if there are links with KTV work, as some women implied that they entered massage work when they were unable to do KTV work anymore.

Because a significant number of respondents in this study (51%) had previously worked in the garment factory industry, targeted research about this group is recommended. It is recommended that further research is conducted of the vulnerabilities faced by garment factory workers within the factories, as well as the vulnerabilities faced by women upon leaving the factories. Such vulnerabilities and needs have yet to be addressed academically so the researchers believe that this broad, holistic understanding of the massage workers lives provides a strong foundation for more research and initiatives.

The researchers in this study and the participants collectively have demonstrated some of the challenges of working in this industry and have begun the groundwork needed to meet the needs of these women. Women over eighteen years are in fact vulnerable to sexual and other forms of violence with some probability of exploitation as well and should therefore not be ignored by Non Government Organisations and Government social workers..

## References

- Age of Consent. (2019). *Age of Consent and Sexual Abuse Laws Around the World*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ageofconsent.net/>
- Boyatzis, R. E., (1998) *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic analysis & code development*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. ISBN: 9780761909613
- Brammer, A., & Smith-Brake, J. (2013). *Journey of change: A Chab Dai study on the trends and influencing factors on counter-trafficking in Cambodia, 2003–2012*. Phnom Penh: Chab Dai Coalition. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55a81f9be4b01a30079bb9d3/t/5745e5d7ab48de4c0a4880d3/1464198632901/Chab+Dai+Journey+of+Change.pdf>
- Bricknall K. Baureaksmey Prak & Bunnak Poch (2014) Domestic Violence Law: The gap between legislation and practice in Cambodia and what can be done about it. Royal Holloway, University of London, ESRC, DFID, GADC <http://www.katherinebrickell.com/katherinebrickell/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/DV-Law-Prelim-Report-2014.pdf>
- Brown, E. (2007). *The ties that bind: Migration and trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation in Cambodia*. Retrieved from: [http://www.humantrafficking.org/uploads/publications/IOM\\_trafficking\\_report\\_Aug07.pdf](http://www.humantrafficking.org/uploads/publications/IOM_trafficking_report_Aug07.pdf)
- Davis, J., & Miles, G. (2012). "The Lingha Boys of Siem Reap" A Baseline Study of Sexually-

- Exploited Young Men in Siem Reap, Cambodia. Fourth Annual Interdisciplinary Conference on Human Trafficking, Lincoln, Nebraska, 2012.
- <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/humtrafconf4/12>
- Derks, A. (1997). *Trafficking of Cambodian women and children to Thailand*. International Organization for Migration. <https://doi.org/10.1.1.843.6089>
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6, (3), pp. 167-191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>
- Hoefinger, H. (2011). Professional girlfriends: An ethnography of sexuality, solidarity and subculture in Cambodia. *Cultural Studies*, 25(2), 244-266.
- <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2011.535990>
- Hoefinger, H. (2013). *Sex, love and money in Cambodia: Professional girlfriends and transactional relationships*. London: Routledge.
- <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203550786>
- Lansink, A. (2004). *Proceedings from International Law Association Berlin Conference: Women and migration: interim report on trafficking in women*. Berlin, Germany: Committee on Feminism and International Law. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2006.9674774>
- Maher, L., Mooney-Somers, J., Phlong, P., Couture, M. C., Stein, E., Evans, J., ... & Page, K. (2011). Selling sex in unsafe spaces: sex work risk environments in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. *Harm reduction journal*, 8(1), 30. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7517-8-30>
- Maltoni, B. (2007, May). Migration in Cambodia: Internal vs. external flows. In *8th ARPMIN Conference on Migration, Development and Poverty Reduction* (pp. 25-29). Unpublished paper.

McVerry, S., & Lindop, E. (2005). Negotiating risk: how women working in massage parlours preserve their sexual and psychological health. *Health care for women international*, 26(2), 108-117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399330590905567>

Miles, G. M., & Alsiyao, D. (2019). " Disgusted with Myself": Examining the Risk Factors and Vulnerabilities of Hostesses at Karaoke TV Venues in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence*, 4(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2019.04.01.09>

Miles, G., Blase, O., Clark, K., Ding, R., & Geyer, T. (2014). "STRIVE NO MATTER WHAT": Assessing the vulnerabilities of Female Massage Workers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia'. Retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170323111736/http://themessageparlour.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Massage-Parlor-Women-Report.pdf>

MoYES, (2012). *Examining Life Experiences and HIV Risks of Young Entertainment Workers in Four Cambodian Cities*. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports. Retrieved from: <https://www.aidsdatahub.org/Examining-Life-Experiences-and-HIV-Risks-of-Young-Entertainment-Workers-in-Four-Cambodian-Cities>

Peck, S. M. (1978). *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth*. New York City: Simon and Schuster. Retrieved from: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/34470388/The\\_Road\\_Less\\_Traveled.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1556616566&Signature=Mhox0r%2FNfVIEGWHHd%2Bv9k%2Fag6tM%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DThe\\_Road\\_Less\\_Traveled\\_25th\\_Anniversary.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/34470388/The_Road_Less_Traveled.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1556616566&Signature=Mhox0r%2FNfVIEGWHHd%2Bv9k%2Fag6tM%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DThe_Road_Less_Traveled_25th_Anniversary.pdf)

- Phlong, P., Weissman, A., Holden, J., & Liu, K. L. (2012). *Examining Life Experiences and HIV Risks of Young Entertainment Workers in Four Cambodian Cities*. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport Report, Family Health International 360. Retrieved from: <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/tg-ibbss-cambodia.pdf>
- Sanders, T. (2007). Protecting the health and safety of female sex workers: the responsibility of all. *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, 114(7), 791-793. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0528.2007.01378.x>
- Sandy, L. (2006). Sex work in Cambodia: Beyond the voluntary/forced dichotomy. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 15(4), 449-469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/011719680601500402>
- Sandy, L. (2009). Just choices: Representation of choice and coercion in sex work in Cambodia. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 18(2), 194-206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1835-9310.2007.tb00088.x>
- Shaw, D. (2013). *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cambodia*. International Justice Mission. Retrieved from: <https://www.ijmuk.org/documents/studies/CSEC-Prevalence-Cambodia-FINAL-12-Sept-2013-1.pdf>
- Smith-Brake, Julia. Lim, Vanntheary. Nhanh, Chhantha. (2015), 'Economic Reintegration of Survivors of Sex Trafficking: Experiences and Expressions of Filial Piety and Financial Anxiety'. The Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project: A Chab Dai study on (Re-) integration: Researching the lifecycle of sexual exploitation & trafficking in Cambodia (Phnom Penh: Chab Dai). <https://healtrafficking.org/publications/economic-reintegration-of-survivors-of-sex-trafficking-experiences-and-expressions-of-filial-piety-and-financial-anxiety/>



[piety-and-financial-anxiety/](#)

Steinfatt, T. M. (2003). Measuring the number of trafficked women and children in Cambodia: a direct observation field study. *part III of a series*. <http://doi.org/10.1.1.320.8589>

UNODC, (2008). *Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation*. Retrieved from:

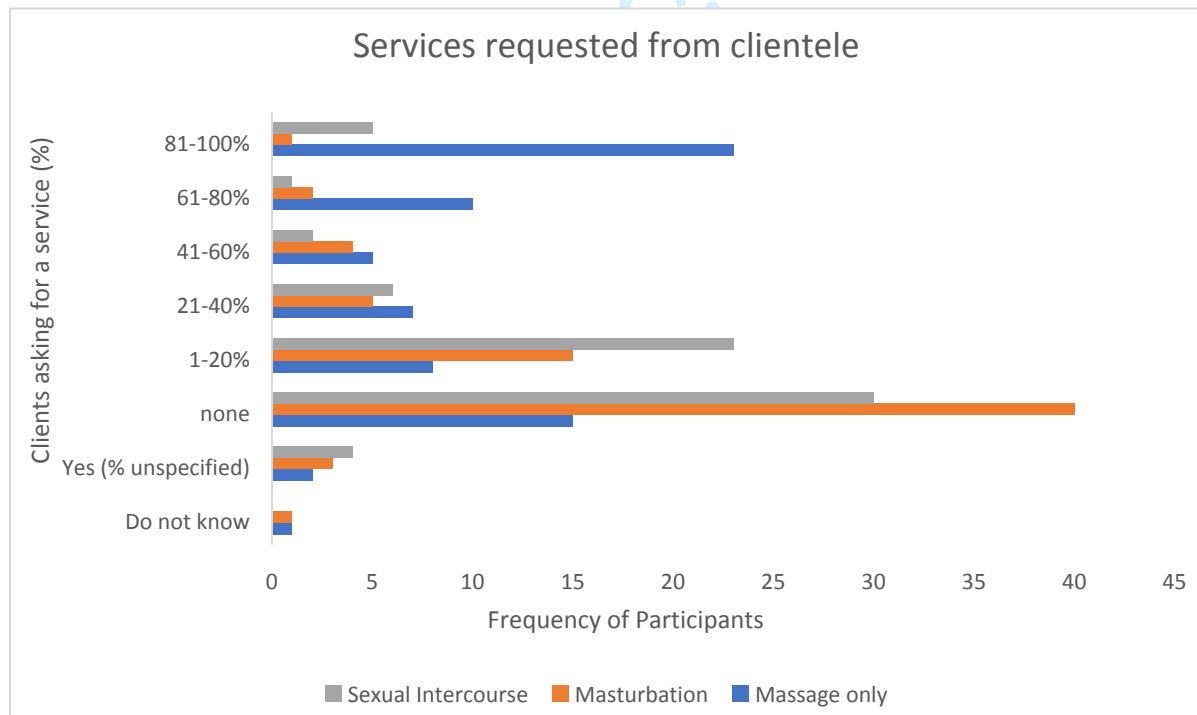
[https://www.unodc.org/res/cld/document/khm/2008/law\\_on\\_suppression\\_of\\_human\\_trafficking\\_and\\_sexual\\_exploitation\\_html/Cambodia\\_03\\_-\\_Law-on-Suppression-of-Human-Trafficking-and-Sexual-Exploitation-15022008-Eng.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/res/cld/document/khm/2008/law_on_suppression_of_human_trafficking_and_sexual_exploitation_html/Cambodia_03_-_Law-on-Suppression-of-Human-Trafficking-and-Sexual-Exploitation-15022008-Eng.pdf)

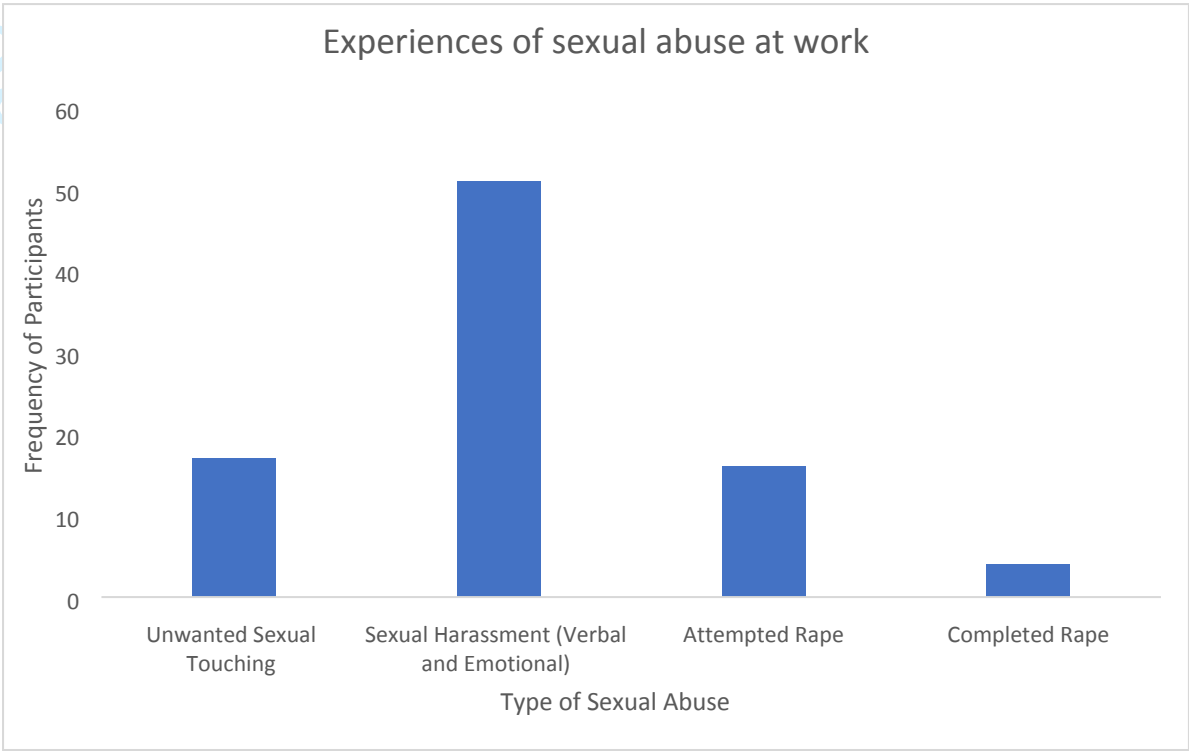
Webber, G., Edwards, N., Graham, I., Amaratunga, C., Keane, V., & Socheat, R. (2010). Life in the big city: The multiple vulnerabilities of migrant Cambodian garment factory workers to HIV. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33(3), 159-169. Retrieved from: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S027753950900154X>

Descriptive Statistics: Demographics & Financial implications		
	Mean	Range
Age (Years)	27	18-52
Age that Participant started working at Massage Parlour (Years)	25	18-29
Income (n=71) per week (USD)	N/A*	\$2-300
Income (n=71) per three months (USD)	N/A*	\$1-1000
Family Debt (USD)	N/A	\$1-5500

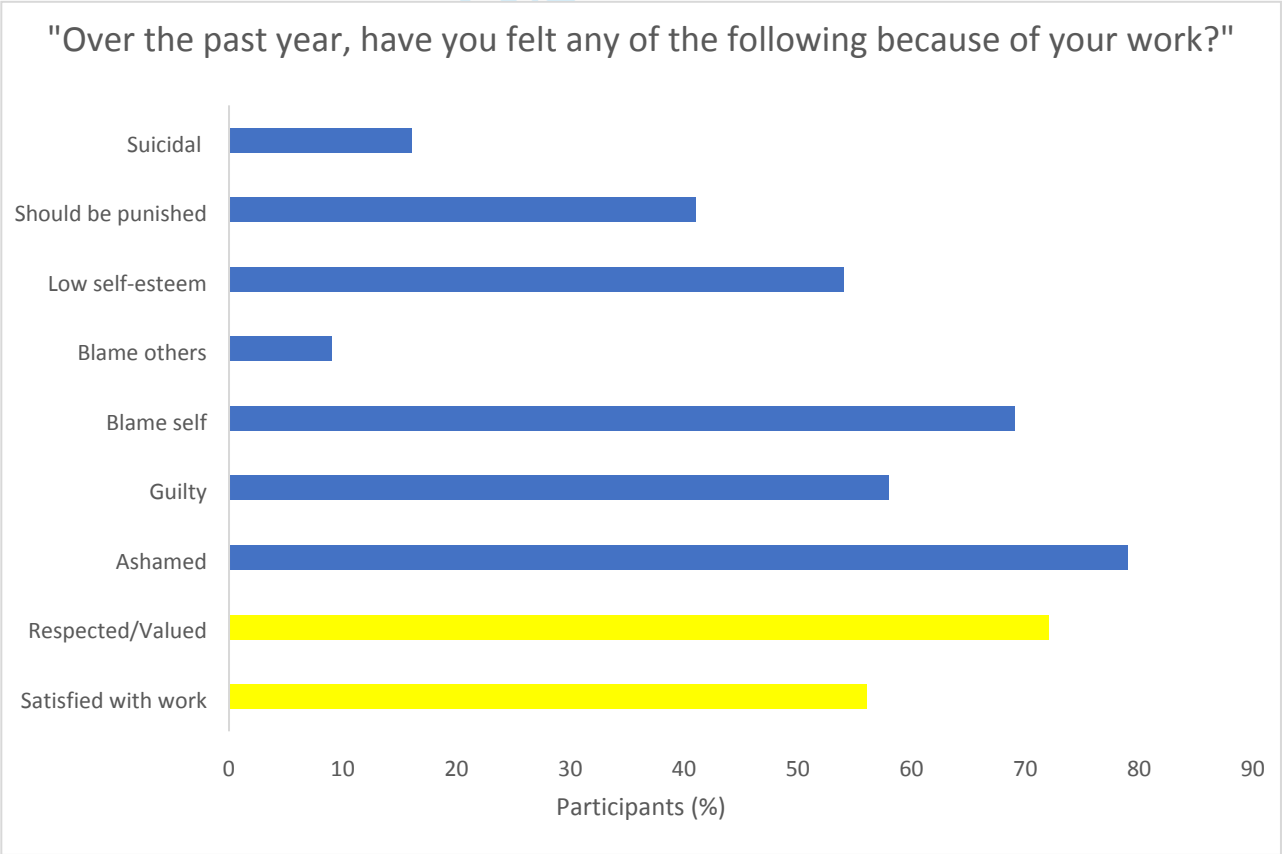
**Table 1:** A descriptive statistics table showing participants mean and range scores of two demographic & three financial categories. \*The mean weekly and monthly income is not reported as 28% (n=20) and 42% (n=30) of participants, respectively, did not know their income which significantly impacted the quality of the results.

**Graph 1:** A graph that shows the frequency of participants that were asked to perform different services by clients, as well as, the percentage of their clients that asked for that service. It should be noted that results indicating the frequency of participants that were asked to perform/receive oral sex as not been reported due to the high frequency of confused responses, particularly regarding the differences between giving and receiving oral sex.

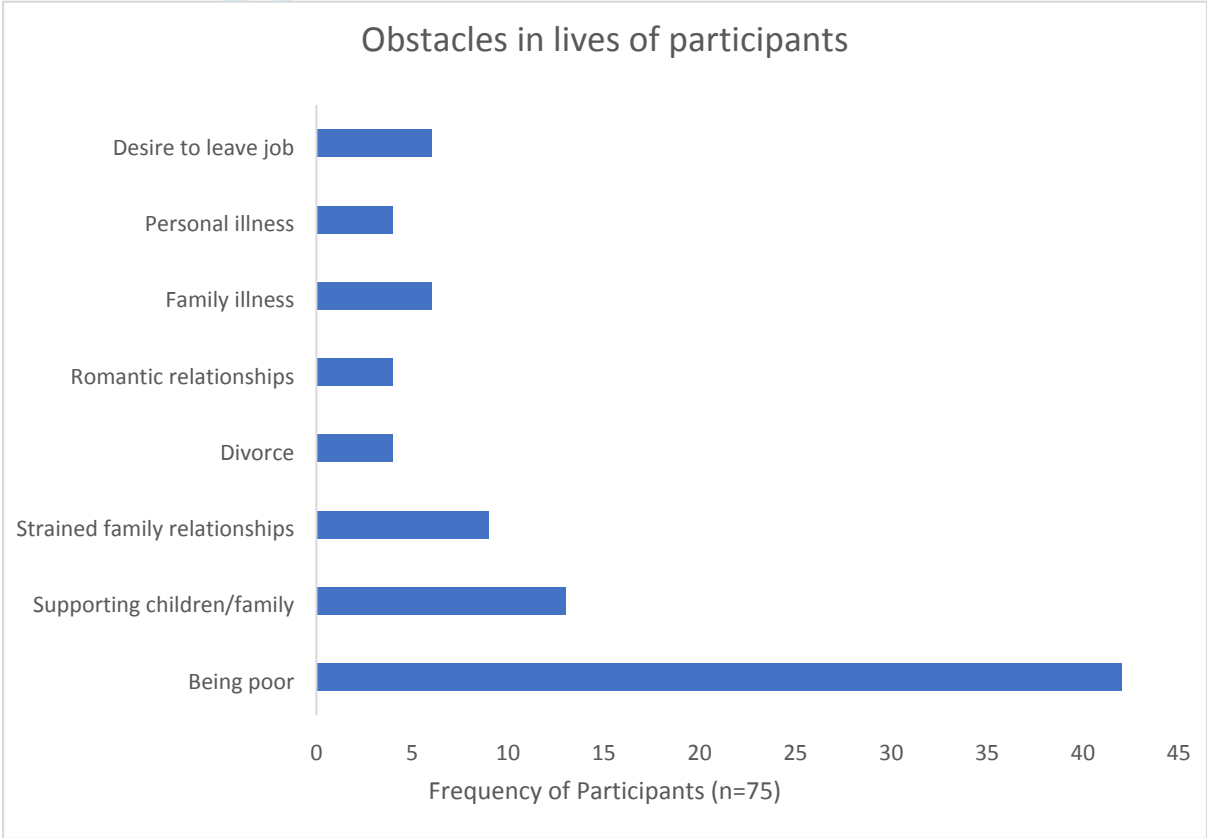




**Graph 2:** A graph that illustrates the frequency of participants that experienced different types of sexual abuse at massage parlors.



**Graph 3:** A graph that illustrates the percentage of participants that stated that they have felt the cited negative and positive feelings.



**Graph 4:** A graph that illustrates the various obstacles they face during their lives and the frequency of participants that had experienced them.