

TELL THEM WHAT HAPPENED TO ME

AN EXPLORATION OF ONLINE AND OFFLINE
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF MALES
AND SOGIE-DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE
IN NORTHERN THAILAND

“Tell them what happened to me”

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IN NORTHERN THAILAND

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Executive Summary

As travel and tourism have become more readily accessible to individuals across the globe, and as internet usage continues to expand, the sexual exploitation of children and youth—both online and in-person—has also become dangerously convenient for sexual predators visiting and living in Thailand. In the past, physical locations such as bars, karaoke, and massage parlors have been the main venues for sex trade. In the past several years, Urban Light (UL) outreach teams note less visibility of boys under the age of 18 working within these environments¹. This may indicate that stronger legal enforcement in these establishments, accompanied by technological advancements, the advent of social media, and ‘dating’ and ‘hook up’ applications, may have contributed to pushing the sexual exploitation of children/youth underground and online.

The purpose of the current study, therefore, was to understand the current state of online commercial sexual exploitation of boys and young men in Thailand.

To answer these questions, a respondent-driven sampling (RDS) methodology was used. This methodology allowed for access to respondents who may have been otherwise unknown to researchers, and more organic recruitment of respondents through their social networks. Data collection began following ethical review board approval. Once respondents were informed of, and agreed to take part in the study, respondents were asked to complete a series of quantitative and qualitative online survey questions. Questions included information regarding respondents’ entrance into sex trade, experiences of trading sex in person and online, concerns regarding the risks of sex trade, experiences with service providers, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and their perceptions of, and understanding of, the meaning of sexual exploitation. Necessary time and recruitment adaptations were made to the study methodology to accommodate the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Data was analyzed from a total of 94 people, all of whom were assigned male at birth (AMAB). These respondents ranged in age from 16 to 39 years old. Approximately 5% (n = 5) of respondents were under the age of 18 and 39.3% (n = 37) fell within the UN definition of youth (age 15-24). Gender identity was diverse including 46% (n = 43) of respondents identifying as Cisgender Male, 54% (n = 51) identifying as Trans/Third Gender. Given the known understanding of the diverse experiences of Cisgender Males compared to Trans/Third Gender people, many of the results presented have been separated based on gender identity to respect these differences. Almost all respondents identified their nationality as Thai (98%, n = 91).

¹ Davis et al. (2013). [Boys for baht? An exploratory study on the vulnerability of male entertainment workers in Chiang Mai, Thailand.](#)

Please note, as many respondents identified as youth, we want to be clear that any trade of sex or sexual services between a minor and an adult, like those noted in the following results, represents sexual abuse and exploitation. Children cannot sell sex as they are not able to consent. This is true even where a child ‘appears’ to consent or ‘initiates’ an exchange.

Similarly, where this report refers to ‘customers’, in the case where a ‘customer’ is purchasing or sex or providing anything in exchange for sex or sexual services with someone under the age of 18, this person should be understood to be a perpetrator of sex trafficking and/or child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSEA).

Key Learnings

The study's results found several key findings:

1. **The use of the internet for child sexual exploitation and sex trade is widespread and pervasive.**
 - Contrary to previous beliefs regarding separate populations of in-person and online victims of exploitation, the current results found that the internet is just one of many methods of engaging in the sex trade, with the majority of respondents noting participation in both in-person and online engagement with customers.
 - Sending sexual photos or videos to customers was the most commonly indicated online sexual activity (43%).
2. **Opportunities for employment, housing, and education are critical to preventing sexual exploitation.**
 - When asked what would help most in preventing future exploitation, respondents repeatedly reported the need for employment opportunities, housing, and education.
3. **Physical and sexual violence were commonly reported among respondents.**
 - Nearly two third of respondents (65%) indicated they had been raped and/or sexually assaulted.
 - Over a quarter of respondents (26%) indicated that they had been physically assaulted by a customer in the last six months
4. **The COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on the livelihood of young people in the sex trade.**
 - Respondents noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant decrease and often complete elimination of their income through sex trade and other outlets.
5. **Gender norms and expectations present unique vulnerabilities for cisgender males and trans/third gender people from accessing and receiving support and services.**

- Respondents across gender identities reported that the taboo surrounding sex and sexuality was the biggest challenge to opening up to service providers (e.g. case workers, social workers, medical professionals, local authorities, etc.).
- 6. Misperceptions of rape and sexual abuse inhibit the reporting and prevention of childhood sexual exploitation.**
 - Only 28% of respondents were able to identify sexual exploitation happening in any of the given scenarios.
 - 7. Potential victims wish to report crimes without their personal information being disclosed**
 - 32% of all respondents noted that the option to remain anonymous would encourage them to report experiences of abuse or exploitation.
 - 8. Adaptive research methods allowed us to better map the landscape of online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC).**
 - An RDS methodology allowed us to respond and adapt to unexpected responses in the findings and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - As the landscape for OSEC continues to grow and adapt, knowledge and intervention to combat OSEC needs to stay equally informed.

This report also includes comprehensive recommendations for community members, service providers, policy makers, funders, and researchers. Broadly, these recommendations include additional support for boys and young people who experience abuse and exploitation, focused on decreasing gendered pressure and societal stigma. This includes the implementation and funding for outreach that includes online outlets and utilizes the known benefits of peer support. Additionally, early intervention is needed for boys and SOGIE² youth with known vulnerability factors (e.g. homelessness, poverty, trauma) to prevent exploitation. Finally, among others, there is a critical need to increase access to basic needs and services including employment, education, and housing to decrease the financial pressures that can lead to exploitation and abuse.

² Commonly referred to as 'LGBT'; however, the authors have opted to use the broader term 'SOGIE-diverse' (i.e. Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity) in order to be inclusive of the potentially considerable variations of in sex, sexuality, and gender identity.

Introduction

Chiang Mai is a gateway city to Northern Thailand's rural North. It contains an airport, major highways, modern hotels and many varied businesses aimed at travelers and tourists³. Most tourists traveling in Northern Thailand arrive first in Chiang Mai. Its rapid development is a large pull factor attracting internal migration from other provinces in Thailand, as well as cross border migration, most notably from neighboring Myanmar, in search of work, higher wages and a way to support their families⁴. Over the years, as travel and tourism have become more readily accessible to individuals regionally and internationally, the sexual exploitation of children—in person—has also become convenient for sexual predators visiting and living in Thailand.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, a global review of literature indicates that rates of violence in the home have increased in part due to increased contact between family members.⁵ In Thailand, this increase in home violence has created an environment in which boys, young men, and transgender children and adults particularly vulnerable to unsafe work as they attempt to escape unsafe home conditions.⁶ Further, conversations and responses regarding sexual exploitation and abuse rarely include the unique needs and experiences of boys, young men, and transgender children and adults. Consequently, many have found themselves in exploitative situations working the tourist sex industry in the red-light district, karaoke bars, in massage parlors, or as freelance sex workers in public spaces.⁷

Over the past decade, the current research team has been involved in several pieces of research illuminating the frequently overlooked issues faced by vulnerable males in Thailand. Previous research has helped to inform the design of this study, and to a limited extent, can help to provide a comparison of findings indicating patterns and changes over time. For a review of this previous literature please see Annex 2.

Building on preceding research and known need, the current study pays particular attention to exploring online sexual exploitation. As technology advances rapidly, and the world adapts to life online, there is a need to gain a greater understanding of the links between the online and offline exploitation of particularly vulnerable groups of people including boys and transgender children and adults.

³ Lacher & Neptal (2010). [Dependency and development in northern Thailand](#).

⁴ Balčaitė (2019). [Brokered \(Il\)legality: Co-producing the Status of Migrants from Myanmar to Thailand](#)

⁵ Kourti et al., (2021). [Domestic Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review](#).

⁶ Human Rights Watch (2010). [From the Tiger to the Crocodile](#).

⁷ Davis et al. (2013). [Boys for baht? An exploratory study on the vulnerability of male entertainment workers in Chiang Mai, Thailand](#).

The authors believe that children and young people are experts of their own experience and should be included in decisions around policy and programs involving them. This is recommended by Article 12 in the UNCRC⁸ but also in the current debate around co-production even of vulnerable people. Given this commitment, the current research intentionally provides an opportunity for respondents to have a voice and for their voices to be used in advocating for themselves and their peers.

The research team hopes that this study and its recommendations will provide an evidence base that can be used to inform the efforts of NGOs, funders, and governmental organizations in Thailand and beyond, in the fight against sex trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Objectives

This study aims to improve the local knowledge base of how boys, young men, and SOGIE-⁹diverse young people engage in the sex trade and are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, including child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSEA). While the information in this study is geographically specific to Chiang Mai, it is our hope that this research will be able to inform service providers and change-makers in the broader national, regional, and global context. The data presented will help to broaden the understanding of how boys, young men, and SOGIE-diverse young people are exploited online and their unique vulnerabilities in the online space to sexual abuse. Of particular concern are those under the age of 18, who are especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation through online platforms and mobile applications. The identification of vulnerable people and suspected victims will may be more challenging in these contexts, compared to the ways in which sex work has traditionally been organized, in physical locations (e.g., bars, massage parlors, and on the streets).

Over the years, Urban Light staff have reported a decrease in the number of underage boys visible in these spaces. This was part of the impetus for this study. It is possible that anti-trafficking organizations and law enforcement agencies may have had a positive impact in preventing child sex trafficking in these establishments. On the other hand, perpetrators and facilitators of human trafficking may have adapted by moving their operations online environments where monitoring and enforcement is more challenging and where vulnerable children and young people can easily be groomed.

Globally, anti-trafficking prevention organizations and law enforcement working to prevent sexual exploitation in online environments have lagged behind current technology and often failed to keep up in protecting those who are most vulnerable. The constant change in what online spaces exist, are

⁸ UNCRC (2009). [Convention on the Rights of a Child: Article 12](#).

⁹ Commonly referred to as 'LGBT'; however, the authors have opted to use the broader term 'SOGIE-diverse' (i.e. Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity) in order to be inclusive of the potentially considerable variations of in sex, sexuality, and gender identity.

popular, and are used to facilitate sex trade and trafficking have allowed predators and perpetrators to maintain the upper hand. Further, the lack of global laws and regulations regarding online commercial sexual exploitation also presents a significant limitation to combatting and prosecuting online sexual exploitation.¹⁰ Coupled with the skill of traffickers and predators in seeking out and recruiting vulnerable people, the fight against online exploitation is a constant and ongoing struggle for NGOs, governments, and service providers across the globe. Urban Light (UL) anticipates that demand through mobile and online platforms will increase in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has – at least temporarily – drastically reduced tourism to Thailand. Furthermore, even as Thailand's tourism economy is showing signs of recovery, increasing global access to internet connection means that the concerns regarding online exploitation will remain an important issue for everyone involved in fighting human trafficking and child exploitation.

Methods

The research takes a mixed-methods approach. Data was to be analyzed using quantitative, descriptive, and qualitative content analysis techniques. The research employed a respondent-driven sampling (RDS) methodology ([see diagram of RDS map](#)), which allowed for a more organic mapping of social networks and access to potential respondents that might otherwise have remained unknown to researchers. The research team also made an intentional effort to, where possible, involve potential subjects and known participants (i.e. seeds) in the development and production of the research itself. Respondents contacting other potential respondents was based on the idea of co-production and Article 12 and 13 of the UNCRC recognizing that sexually exploited respondents are experts of their own experiences and context. As recruitment and data collection took place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand, it should be noted that several necessary adaptations were made to the current design and methodology. Additionally, data collection was paused for a period due to safety concerns and shutdowns. Changes made to the original research plan are outlined in more detail below.

Sample

Survey responses were collected from a total of 94 young people, all of whom were assigned male at birth (AMAB). Respondents were recruited using a respondent-driven sampling methodology. Though there was an initial expectation of recruiting more respondents twenty-four years and under (UN definition of youth¹¹), respondents were included up to the age of 39, and it was decided that the

¹⁰ Hoyer, J. (2017). [Sex trafficking in the digital age: the role of virtual currency-specific legislation in keeping pace with technology](#).

¹¹ United Nations (n.d.). [Global issues: Youth](#).

majority of respondents should be included (even if they were older than 24). The study did not limit the inclusion criteria to below twenty-four alone for multiple reasons. First, we wanted the responses to be truly respondent driven, leading to information regarding the natural networks of the seeds. Second, as people can experience victimization and/or exploitation at any point during their life, we wanted to capture the potential for this victimization in adults, and adults who may have been sexually exploited as children.

However, it was determined that eight individuals were not eligible for inclusion in the current study due to being older than the (adjusted) inclusion criteria of 39 years of age. These cases were subsequently deleted from the dataset leaving a final sample size of 94. The decision to include results from the full sample of respondents, though not all identified as cis-gender males, as well as the eventual separation by gender identity was also decided based on what remains unknown regarding the landscape of online sexual exploitation among transgender individuals in Thailand and the shared experiences of respondents across gender

Across genders, respondents noted working in the same geographic area and under the same working conditions. Further, in addition to being AMAB, all respondents are likely to have had to assimilate to and diverge from, various masculine social norms and expectations as either a transgender-women, a person of the third gender, or as a man who has sex with other men. How respondents have developed amidst, and interacted with, these social norms are likely to have considerable impact on their perceptions of vulnerabilities and resilience like the ones asked about in the current research.

Data gathering process & challenges

Data collection was done through an online survey. While the initial seeds were all from the Chiang Mai area, and aged 17 to 32, the chain-referral process allowed for the inclusion of individuals residing anywhere in the country of Thailand. The first phase gathered responses from the 25th of March to the 14th of April, 2021, and the second phase from the 10th June and the 24th June, with one final respondent submitting their answer on the 17th July 2021.

Of note, the outbreak of COVID-19 caused significant delays in the data collection process. First, due to the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent lock downs, it was necessary to pause the data collection for a period of time. Recruitment was also complicated by the continued shut down of spaces frequented by the target population including bars, markets, and other public spaces.

Urban Light's (UL) outreach team was tasked with finding potential respondents from massage parlors, bars, public places and internet cafes (these are the usual areas in which UL staff had been conducting outreach trips). Urban Light's case management team was responsible for finding potential respondents from the group of boys and young men who attend UL's drop-in center. Finally,

Urban Light's social worker/community development officer also assisted in the data collection, particularly in the recruitment of SOGIE-diverse respondents.

Staff conducted outreach/field visits starting in December 2020 to talk to boys and young men in the area to see who was interested in completing the survey, and explained what the survey was about so that they could understand the purpose and process.

The original methodology aimed to collect 110 respondents through three phases:

- Phase 1 finds 10 seeds
- Phase 2 seeds recruit 50 more respondents
- Phase 3 the second phase recruited 50 respondents

Each respondent who successfully completed a survey was provided with a financial incentive of 300 THB (~\$8.5 USD), sent to their bank or social media account used to complete the assent/consent process. A slight deviation from the original plan to provide online supermarket coupons, preliminary responses from potential respondents requested bank transfers instead, citing the economic hardship they were currently facing due to the pandemic, as well as the inconvenience and health and safety concerns of going to a large supermarket during this time frame. For each successful referral of another respondent, the individual making the referral received an additional incentive of 200 THB. Referred respondents indicated the assigned code of the individual who referred them in their consent/assent form, which was separated from the research instrument (thus, no identifying referral information was present in the raw research data. In addition, respondents were provided with information (contact name, phone number, and email) in case they should wish to follow up, seek assistance, or withdraw their response.

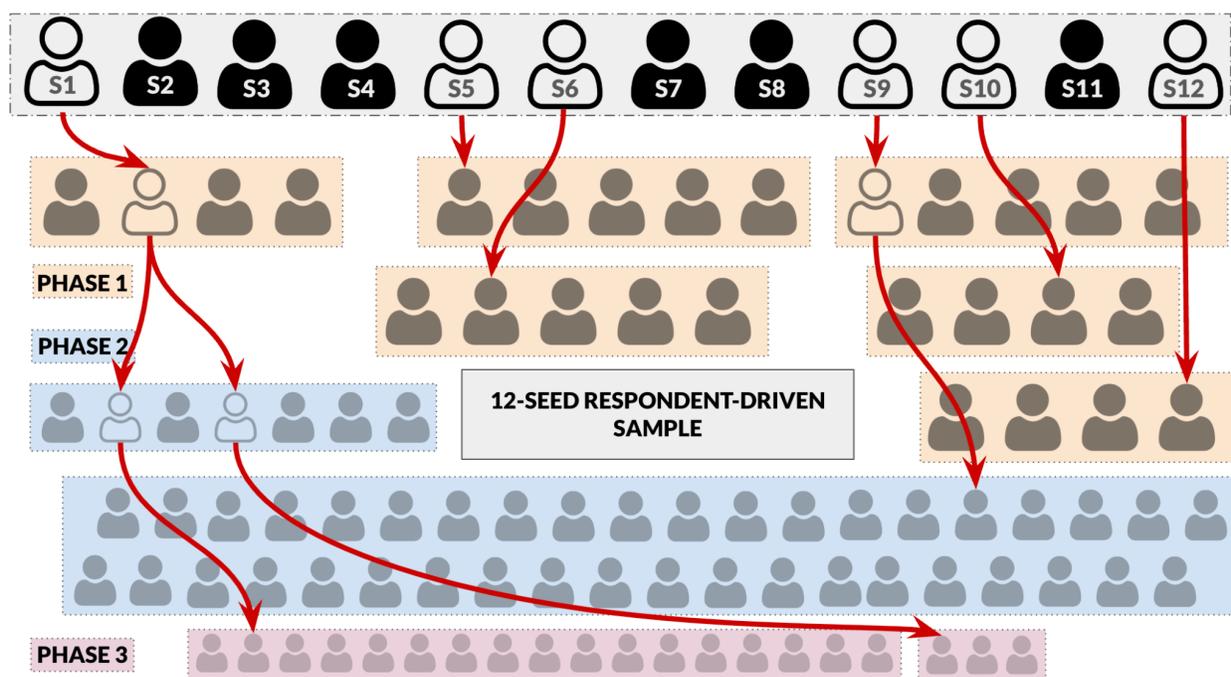
The target sample for the current study were young people who sold sex in massage parlors, bars, karaoke bars, gaming cafes, and public areas. At least 30 potential respondents who happen to be employed in establishments voluntarily declined participation due to lack of sufficient financial incentive and/or for fears of legal retribution given the illegality of sex trade in Thailand. Thus, it was necessary to adapt the sampling plan as the data collection progressed. Urban Light staff also reached out to young LGBTQ+ clients/volunteers who were already known to the data collection team through partnership with local NGOs from around Chiang Mai to help find respondents. It was noted by one staff member, and is clear from the RDS map, that most of the LGBTQ+ respondents do not work in the same place, but are a close-knit community. The staff member reported that due to the economic hardship created by the COVID-19 pandemic, this financial payment was especially incentivizing to this group and encouraged others in their community to take part.

During the course of data cleaning and analysis, the authors recognized a significant split in respondents based on gender identity. Specifically, approximately half of all respondents identified as

cisgender males and the other half as trans or third gender individuals. Further, the majority of trans/third gender respondents were recruited by the same seed (Seed 9) and likely come from a group who know each other. Given the known differences in experiences between these two groups, the authors made the decision to, where relevant, expand on the study findings by noting differences based on gender identity.

Figure 1 (below) shows that the research began with 12 seed respondents. Seeds 1, 5, 6, 10, and 12 were Cisgender males (49%; n = 49) and tended to recruit other cisgender males. Seeds 5, 6, 10, & 12 end after two phases and Seed 1 survives three phases (n = 26). Seed 9 identified as Trans/third gender. As with cisgender males, Trans/third gender respondents tended to recruit other trans/third gender respondents. Seed 9 recruited five respondents, the first of whom went on to recruit 36 other trans/third gender respondents and ended after three phases. Due to the oversampling of seed 9, third/trans gender respondents in this sample are, overall, and a much more homogenous group, in comparison to cisgender males.

FIGURE 1: Three-phase survival map of 12-seed respondent driven sample



Ethical considerations

Prior to data collection, the research team sought to work with an Independent Ethical Review Board to provide an ethical review of research survey questions with the intention of establishing that the research including research design, data collection, proposed methods of analyses, etc., was ethical. In

the absence of an ethical NGO review board, an informal but rigorous review board was composed of Dr. Bencharat Sae Chue, Dr. Mike Hayes, and Dr. Mark Capaldi who are independent academics with particular experience in research with vulnerable populations and children. Separate from the online survey, prior to entering the research questionnaire, respondents were provided with an informed consent document (See Annex 1) and were asked to read it through it prior to accepting its contents. This document included: the purpose and methodology of the research, an explanation of how respondents' information would be anonymized and protected when taking the survey, and clear recognition that participation in the survey was voluntary and choosing to not participate at any point throughout would not result in any penalties.

In the data collection process, in order to complete the survey, an informed consent form was required. Potential respondents were informed that the data collected would be kept secure, and if at any time the respondents wanted to cancel/discontinue or miss individual questions, they could do so with no negative consequences. Indeed, if they felt uncomfortable or stressed when taking the survey or afterwards, they could receive support from Urban Light staff.

After reading through the informed consent, respondents who chose to continue were provided with assent and consent information and asked to check boxes next to essential points of the [assent/consent document](#). Respondents were then asked to sign electronically by placing two initials of their own choosing to represent themselves. Upon completion of the form, the respondent was provided with a link to the anonymous, confidential survey.

Data was kept secure, on password protected folders and in such a way that individuals could not be identified. Analysis of the majority of the survey questions was quantitative, although largely reliant on descriptive statistics and preliminary group comparison. Analysis of open-ended survey questions was qualitative thematic analysis involving coding of the responses.

Limitations

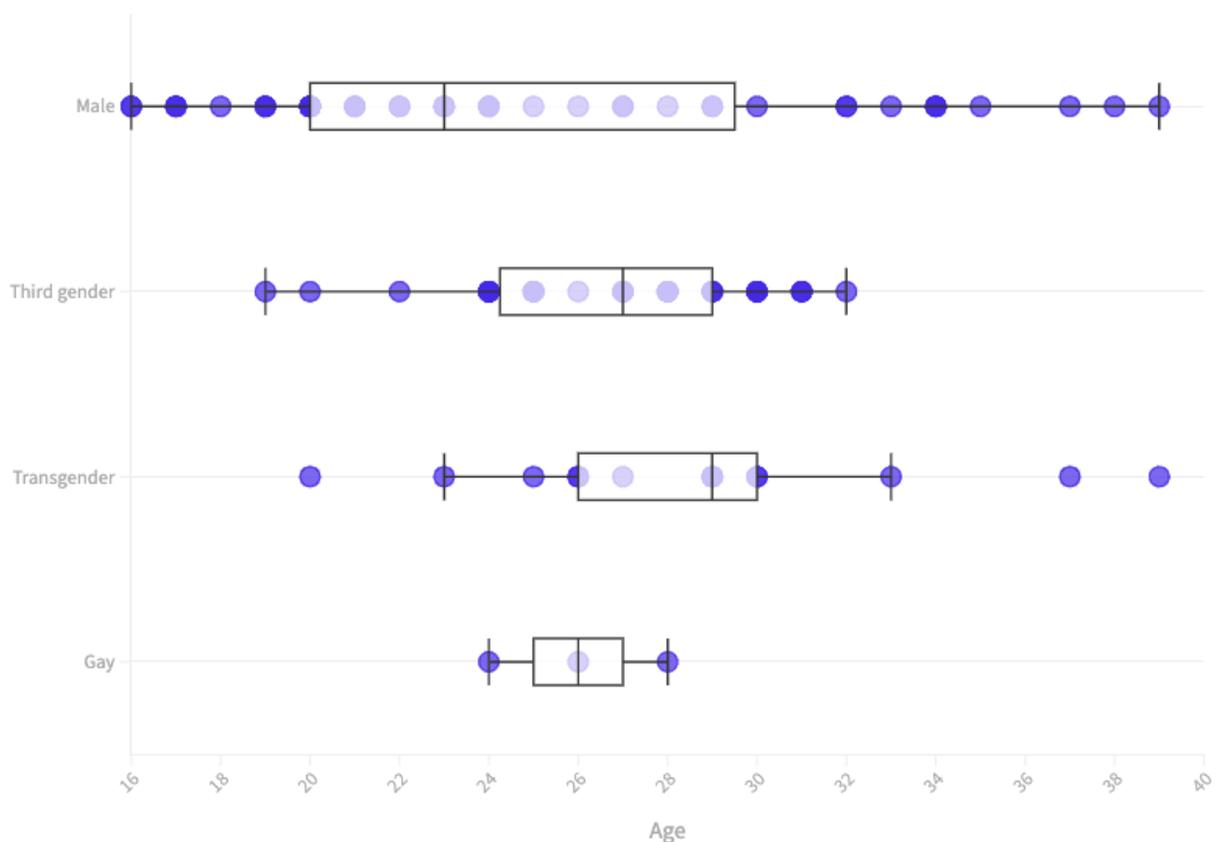
The research is not intended to be statistically representative of any particular sexually exploited population, but rather to gather a range of opinions, estimates, perceptions and experiences reported, and to offer valuable insight into an under-researched and under-reported area of child safeguarding. As mentioned earlier, some people declined to take the survey for fear of legal retribution relating to the illegal nature of the work. In addition, COVID 19 itself also limited what was able to be done and when.

Findings

Demographics

Respondents ranged in age from 16 to 39 years old with an average age across all respondents of 29 years old. Approximately 5% (n = 5) were under the age of 18 and 37 respondents (39.3%) fell within the UN definition of youth (age 15-24). Trans/third gender respondents were considerably older than cisgender respondents. Their average age was 27 years old compared to the average for cisgender respondents of 25. Further, approximately 22% (n=11) of trans/third gender respondents fell within the UN definition of youth (15-24 years) with none under the age of 18, compared to 57% (n=26) of cisgender respondents who fell within the UN definition of youth.

Figure 2. Box-plot of age across four gender identities.



When asked to identify their gender, respondents were given the options of male, third gender, transgender, and another self-identification. Across all 94 respondents, 46% (n = 43) identified their gender as male, 36% (n = 34) identified as third-gender, 15% (n = 14) identified as a transgender-woman,

and 3% (n =3) wrote in their gender identity as “gay.”¹² For the purposes of this study, respondents identifying their gender as “male” or “gay” were noted under the gender of “cisgender” and those identifying as “third gender” or “transgender” were noted under the gender of “trans/third gender”.

All respondents were also asked who they were attracted to and were given the option to check all the options that applied. Nearly all respondents (94%; n = 88) reported that they were attracted to straight men, 45% (n = 42) to gay men, 38% (n= 36) to women, and 18% (n = 17) to third gender people.

There were considerable differences regarding sexual orientation when comparing cisgender respondents to trans/third gender respondents. Half of all cisgender respondents reported sexual attraction to women compared to 2.7% of trans/third gender respondents. Conversely, over half of trans/third gender respondents reported being sexually attracted to straight men compared to only 11.8% of cisgender respondents.

Education: In total, one in every five respondents (20%, n = 20) reported that they were currently enrolled in education. When asked their highest level of education, 18% (n = 17) reported completion of primary school and 16% (n = 15) reported completion of early secondary school as their highest level. A third of respondents reported that they completed high school (31%, n = 29) with another third noting completion of university education (34%, n = 32). Regarding education by gender identity, cisgender respondents were less likely to have completed education compared to their trans/third gender counterparts. For example, 59% (n=29) of trans/third gender respondents reporting having completed a college/University degree compared to only 7% (n=3) of cisgender respondents.

Table 1. Respondent education.

	Trans/Third Gender		Cisgender Males		All Respondents	
Primary School (Primary 6)	2	(4%)	15	(33%)	17	(18%)
Early Secondary School (M3)	4	(8%)	11	(24%)	15	(16%)
High School (6)	13	(27%)	16	(35%)	29	(31%)
College/University	29	(59%)	3	(7%)	32	(34%)

¹² Please note, that in Thai language and culture, the boundaries between sexual orientation and gender identity are not as solid as in the English language. The research team have, therefore, followed the respondents' answers for those who self-identified as 'gay' for their gender.

Ethnicity: Almost all respondents identified their nationality as Thai (98% n = 91) with the final three respondents noting Burmese, Laos, and unidentified nationality. When asked whether they were members of an ethnic minority inside and/or outside of Thailand, the majority of respondents (72% n = 68) said they were not a part of an ethnic minority group. A quarter 24% (n = 23) of respondents noted being a member of an ethnic minority group of Thailand. The largest ethnic minority identification in Thailand was approximately 14% (n = 13) respondents identifying as being from Isan in Thailand followed by Lahu (4% n = 4), Lisu (3% n = 3), Tai Yai (2% n = 2), and Akha (1%, n = 1) identity. Three respondents indicated being a member of an ethnic minority both in Thailand and outside of Thailand. This pattern was similar across gender. Ninety-eight percent of trans/third gender respondents, and 96% of cisgender respondents reported their nationality as Thai.¹³

Living Context: Five respondents (5%) reported currently being homeless with four who said that they lived in a public area or marketplace and one who said they lived in a shelter (i.e. housing instability). All unhoused respondents were cisgender males. Homelessness, or limited access to stable housing is a risk factor for increased vulnerability for trafficking¹⁴ and is something that Urban Light encounters among its clients often.

Among housed respondents, a majority of respondents reported living in a house (56%, n = 53) and with their parents (40%, n = 38). Over 80% reported growing up with either an immediate family member, relatives, or romantic partner. About two thirds (73% n = 69) of respondents reported living with the same group of people they lived with growing up.

Across gender, 20% (n = 19) reported living with someone who was also trading sex. More cisgender male respondents reported living with someone who also traded sex (26%, n = 12) compared to trans/third gender respondents (14%, n = 7). 50% (n=47) respondents live with people who know they trade sex with the other half noting that the people they live with either don't know they trade sex (27%, n=25) or they weren't sure (23%, n = 22).

¹³ Due, in part, from sampling complications during the COVID-19 pandemic, the respondent sample in the current study is not representative of what is currently known about the ethnic make-up of male/AMAB population of sex workers in Chiang Mai and Thailand broadly. In particular, the overwhelming majority of the current respondents identified their nationality as Thai. Previous literature and experience working with this population has shown that non-Thai individuals and migrants are also represented in the male/AMAB sex worker population in Thailand.

¹⁴ UNANIMA International (2021). [The Intersections of Family Homelessness and Human Trafficking](#).

Meeting economic needs

Income Generation Outside of Trading Sex

In total, 66% (n = 61) of respondents reported having sources of income outside of trading sex. This pattern was consistent across gender with 59% (n = 27) of cisgender males and 69% (n = 34) of trans/third gender respondents reporting having an additional source of income outside of the sex trade. As outlined in Table 2, when asked what kind of work respondents are doing alongside sex trade, the most common response was working in retail (14%, n = 12). 12% (n = 10) reported also being a performer (12%, n = 10), and working in online retail (11%, n = 9). Respondents were also given the opportunity to write-in another kind of work they have been employed in in the past. Individual respondents reported being employed by a private company, working as a mechanic, doing domestic work, gardening, and being a chef's assistant.

Table 2. What kind of work do you do outside of trading sex?

	Trans/Third Gender	Cisgender Male	All Respondents
Unemployed	11 (32%)	13 (48%)	24 (39%)
Retail	6 (18%)	6 (22%)	12 (20%)
Performer	7 (21%)	3 (11%)	10 (16%)
Online retail	5 (15%)	4 (15%)	9 (15%)
Hotel/Restaurant	6 (18%)	2 (7%)	8 (13%)
General staff	6 (18%)	2 (7%)	8 (13%)
Construction	1 (3%)	6 (22%)	7 (11%)
Self-employed	3 (9%)	3 (11%)	6 (10%)

Income Generation from Trading Sex

Reasons for doing this work?

The majority of respondents reported engaging in sex trade because they have the ability to earn money fast (78%, n = 83). Other reasons noted for sex trade include the ability to work when they want (40%, n = 42), having difficulty holding down another job (24%, n = 25) or having no other option (8%, n = 9), and reporting sex trade as a job to make money like other jobs (15%, n = 16). Three respondents reported engaging in sex trade in order to help support their family and 13% (n = 14) reported enjoying sex trade as their reason for doing this work.

This pattern of reasons for engaging in trading sex was relatively consistent across gender identities with a couple of notable exceptions. First, trans/third gender respondents were more likely to note that they traded sex because it was difficult to hold down another job (31%, n = 15) compared to their cisgender male counterparts (22%, n = 10). Second, trans/third gender respondents were more likely to note trading sex because it was a job to make money (22%, n = 11) or because of enjoyment of the work (20%, n = 10) compared to cisgender male respondents (11%, n = 5 & 9%, n = 4 respectively). Finally, cisgender male respondents (13%, n = 6) were more likely than trans/third gender respondents (6%, n = 3) to report trading sex because there are few other job options.

How did you find out about trading sex?

Respondents found out about trading sex from a variety of sources as outlined in Table 3. Across gender identity, the most frequently mentioned way of finding out about trading sex was a friend over the age of 18. Among trans/third gender respondents, a dating app was a second most frequently noted way of finding out. Notably, 13% (n = 6) of cisgender male respondents noted finding out about trading sex from a friend who was under the age of 18. This compared to trans/third gender respondents, none of whom noted finding out about trading sex this way.

Table 3. How did you find out about trading sex?

	Trans/Third Gender	Cisgender Male	All Respondents
Friend over 18 years old	24 (49%)	20 (43%)	44 (46%)
Online (dating app/other site)	17 (18%)	9 (10%)	26 (28%)
Relative over 18 years old	7 (14%)	5 (11%)	12 (13%)
Friend under 18 years old	0 (0%)	6 (13%)	6 (6%)

Weekly Earnings

When asked about how much money respondents make through sex trade, respondents reported an average of ₱4,461 (\$136.01) a week. The minimum amount of reported weekly income was ₱350 (\$10.53) and a maximum of ₱40,000 (\$1,219.51) reported by one respondent. The median weekly income was ₱4,000 (\$121.95).

Across gender identity, trans/third gender respondents reported making a higher average weekly wage compared to cisgender male respondents. Specifically, trans/third gender respondents reported making, on average, ฿5,528 (\$165.91) a week compared to the ฿3,268 (\$98.08) weekly average reported by cisgender male respondents. Further, no trans/third gender respondent reported making less than ฿500 (\$15.01) a week when the lowest reported average by a cisgender male respondent was 350 (\$10.53) per week on average.

Figure 3: Box-plot of age across four gender identities

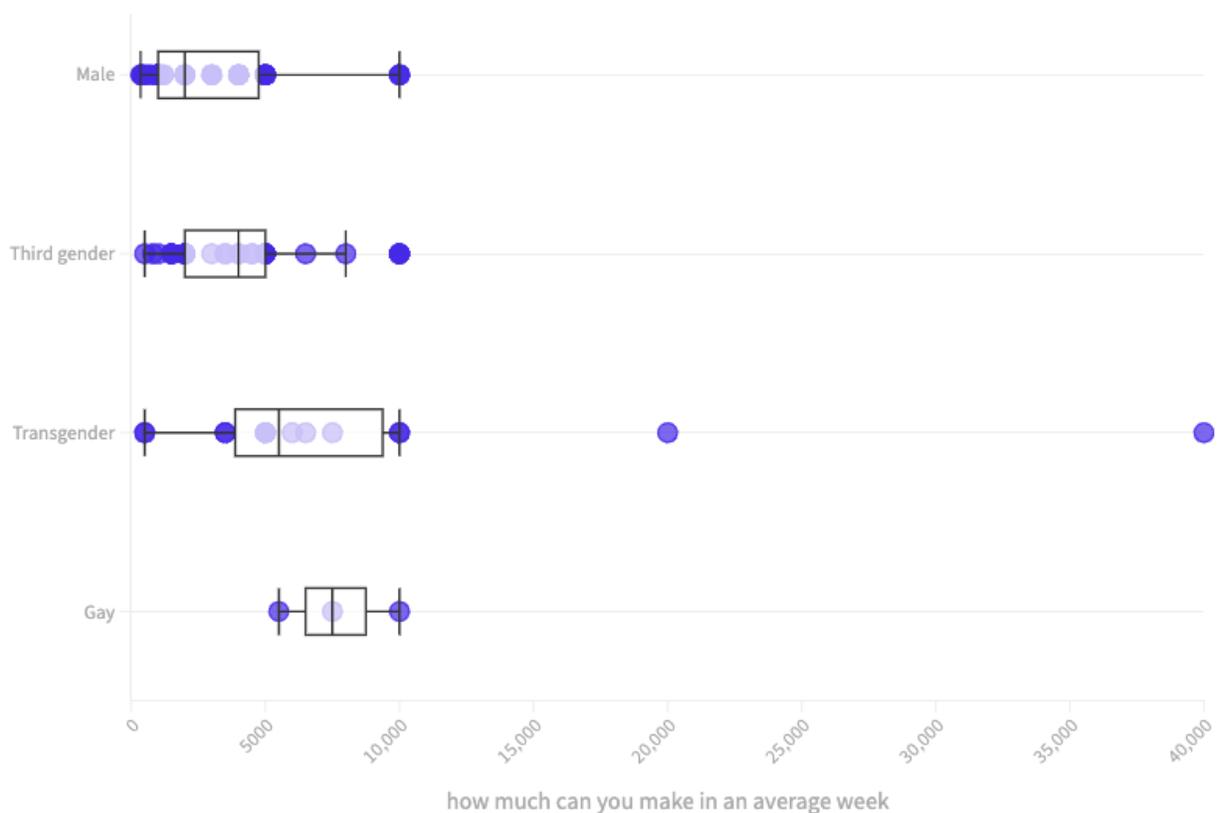


Table 4. Average income of respondents across gender identities.

How much can you make in an average week	Gay (Male)	Cisgender Male	Third Gender	Transgender
Minimum	5,500 THB	350 THB	500 THB	500 THB

Lower quartile	5,500 THB	1,000 THB	2,000 THB	3,500 THB
Median	7,500 THB	2,000 THB	4,000 THB	5,500 THB
Upper quartile	10,000 THB	5,000 THB	5,000 THB	10,000 THB
Maximum	10,000 THB	10,000 THB	10,000 THB	40,000 THB

In total, respondents were making, on average, approximately 2.5 times the official minimum wage in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for a 6-day work week (i.e. ฿325/day, ฿1950/week)¹⁵. For trans/third gender respondents this number was even higher at approximately 2.8 times the minimum weekly wage, and for cisgender males slightly lower at 1.7 times the minimum weekly wage. **Regardless of gender identity, these wages represent a significant increase compared to what could be made in a minimum wage job.**

If you have a stable income, would you stop this work?

Respondents were also asked if they had a stable income, would they stop trading sex. 67% (n = 59) respondents reported that they would stop trading sex if they had a stable income from another source. 23% (n = 20) reported that they would not stop trading sex and 6% (n = 5) were unsure. Of note, a quarter of cisgender male respondents noted that they would stop trading sex if they had a stable income (26%, n = 12). Among trans/third gender respondents this percentage was slightly smaller with only 16% (n = 8) reporting they would stop trading sex.

Note on Childhood Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking

In analyzing the respondents' answers, much of the following findings outline experiences of child sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, and rape both online and in person. **Children cannot sell sex as they are not able to consent.** Any reference to children meeting/seeing customers for sex represents sexual exploitation, abuse, and rape. This is true even where a child 'appears' to consent or 'initiates' an exchange.

Entrance into the Sex Trade

Respondents were then asked how old they were when they first met a customer (in person) for sexual activities. Responses ranged from 13 to 30 years old, with an average age of 19.8 years old. Nearly a third (30%) of respondents said that they first met a 'customer' (in person) for sex while they

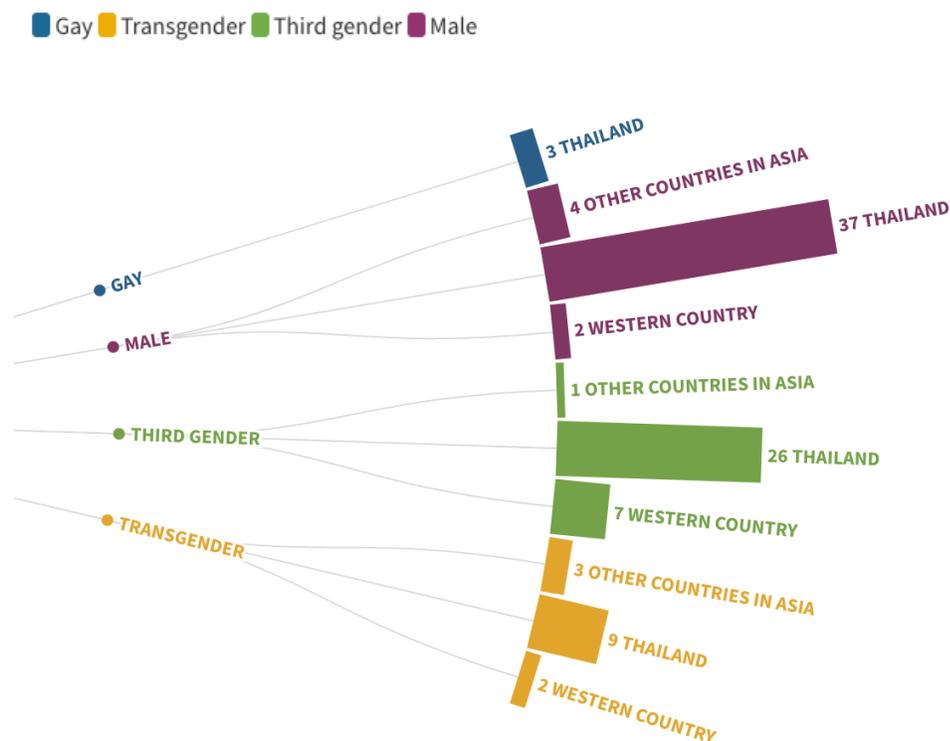
¹⁵ Department of Labor (2019). [Announcement of the Wage Committee. Regarding the Minimum Wage Rate \(No.10\).](#)

were still children (under 18; see note on childhood sexual exploitation above). Similar patterns are seen with regard to gender identity with trans and third-gender respondents being somewhat older on average (20.6 years) when first met a ‘customer’ for sex, in comparison to the average age of cisgender males (18.7 years). Cisgender males in the sample were considerably more likely to have started meeting ‘customers’ for sex while they were still children. While half (50%) of the cisgender male respondents say they started meeting ‘customers’ for sex while children, five (11%) of trans/third gender respondents say the same.

Considering their feelings of personal agency, respondents were asked if they ever feel as though they don’t have a choice in meeting their customers. The largest proportion of respondents (46%) say that they feel this way “just sometimes.” Nearly a third (29%) say they feel this way “almost never” or “never” and nearly a quarter (23%) say they feel this way “regularly” or “always.” Considering gender identity, some overall similar patterns are seen. Trans and third-gender respondents are more likely to say they sometimes do not have a choice in selecting their customers (24%, compared to 22%). Cisgender males are more likely to say they never have a choice (cisgender males = 11%, trans/third gender = 2%).

Considering the national origin of the customers that they meet for sex, the vast majority (84%) of the people they meet online are said to be from Thailand, followed by seven (7%) who say most of their online customers are from western nations, and another seven (7%) who say they’re from other countries in Asia.

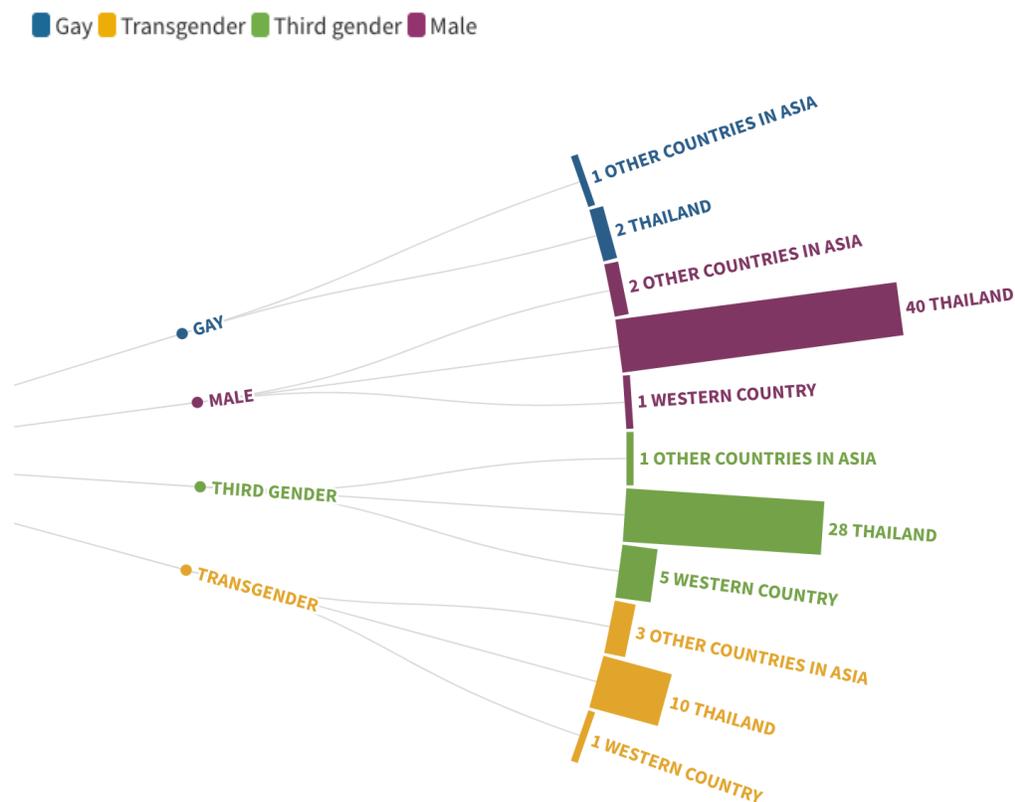
Figure 4: Nationality of in-person customers across four gender identities¹⁶



Overall findings for in-person customers are similar with the vast majority (79%) saying their in-person customers are mainly from Thailand, followed by 11 (12%) whose in-person customers are mainly from western nations and eight (8%) whose in-person customers are from other countries in Asia. Considering gender identity, trans and third gender respondents are more likely to find online and in-person customers from outside Thailand, in comparison to cisgender males. [See Figure 5]

¹⁶ Please note, that in Thai language and culture, the boundaries between sexual orientation and gender identity are not as solid as in the English language. The research team have, therefore, followed the respondents' answers for those who self-identified as 'gay' for their gender.

Figure 5: Nationality of online customers across four gender identities



Trading Sex in Person

Respondents were asked to identify 1) what location they think is most safe for meeting customers and 2) what location they think is least safe for meeting customers. Among the safest places identified, respondents noted their own home (8%, n = 7), public spaces (6%, n = 6), a hotel (5%, n = 5), online (5%, n = 5), and a customers' house (3%, n = 3) among others. Locations noted as least safe for meeting a client were outdoors (13%, n = 12), public spaces (13%, n = 12), customers' house (10%, n = 9), a hotel (8%, n = 7) and the roadside (8%, n = 7). Notably, across all respondents, some locations were among those listed as most safe and least safe including public spaces, a hotel, and a customers' house.

Trading Sex Online

The current study explored the various methods for finding and meeting customers, both online and in-person. The young people were asked how they used the internet (if at all) to meet and engage with their customers. The survey defined three means of engagement:

- Meeting customers online (internet or via an app) and having ‘sex’ online.
- Meeting customers online (internet or via an app) and then meeting in-person for sex.
- Meeting customers in-person and having sex in-person.

All but five respondents (95%) had at least some experience engaging with their customers online. Among the five people who only met customers in-person, three were over the age of 30 and another three of the five had recently migrated from remote areas in Thailand. Most respondents indicate that they meet their customers through a range of means, both online and in-person. Meeting and having sex with customers in-person [see Table 5] was only slightly more common than meeting online (or via app) and having sex in-person [Table 5]. While meeting and having sex in an online environment only [Table 5] was less frequently noted, the majority indicated having at least some experience having online-only sex with 42% saying they engage in it “sometimes” and nearly a third that they do it “occasionally.”

Table 5: Responses regarding meeting clients online and/or in person.

Met Online and Sexual Services Online			
	Trans/Third Gender	Cisgender Male	All Respondents
Always	0 (0%)	1 (0%)	1 (0%)
Often	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	6 (6%)
Sometimes	18 (37%)	22 (37%)	40 (37%)
Occasionally	20 (41%)	10 (41%)	30 (41%)
Never	7 (14%)	9 (14%)	16 (14%)

Met Online and Sexual Services in Person			
	Trans/Third Gender	Cisgender Male	All Respondents
Always	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Often	16 (33%)	9 (20%)	25 (26%)
Sometimes	20 (41%)	21 (46%)	41 (43%)
Occasionally	6 (12%)	10 (22%)	16 (17%)
Never	5 (10%)	4 (9%)	9 (9%)

Met in Person and Sexual Services in Person

	Trans/Third Gender	Cisgender Male	All Respondents
Always	5 (10%)	3 (7%)	8 (8%)
Often	19 (39%)	14 (30%)	33 (35%)
Sometimes	11 (22%)	17 (37%)	28 (29%)
Occasionally	8 (16%)	8 (17%)	16 (17%)
Never	5 (10%)	2 (4%)	7 (7%)

Figure 6. Age Respondents Entered Online and In-Person Sex Trade

	Trans/Third gender	Cisgender male	Total
Current age (average):	27.3	25.0	26.2
Min age:	19.0	16.0	16.0
Age when started trading sex (average):	19.8	18.5	19.2
Min age:	13.0	13.0	13.0
Age when started trading sex ONLINE:	27.3	25.0	26.2
Min age:	15.0	13.0	13.0

Important Note

Findings shown here are child sexual exploitation (CSE). Children cannot sell sex as they are not able to consent. In cases where a child ‘appears’ to consent, or ‘initiates’ an exchange, they are still not able to consent.

Trans and third-gender respondents were somewhat older (19.8 years) when first finding customers online, in comparison to cisgender males (18.2 years). Nearly one in five trans/third gender respondents (18%) and nearly half of cisgender males (45%) were sexually exploited online as a child (prior to the age of 18). Despite nearly a third of respondents would be considered sex trafficking

victims according to the Palermo protocol,¹⁷ the data is not able to conclude whether these individuals would fit the legal definition of a human trafficking victim under the Anti-Trafficking Act, since the survey did not ask about legal proceedings.¹⁸

What of the following online activities have you participated in?

Respondents were also asked to indicate the kinds of online sexual activities that they were aware they had participated in. Respondents were provided with a series of common sexual activities they might do online and asked to choose one. These included:

1. being photographed or videoed by customers for porn sites,
2. being photographed or videoed by customers for client personal use¹⁹,
3. sending sexual photos/videos to customers,
4. live streaming sexual acts alone for customers, and
5. live streaming sexual acts with other people for customers.

Sending sexual photos or videos to customers (43%) was most common. This is followed by more than a quarter (26%) who indicate being photographed or videoed by customers for client personal use and one in six (17%) who indicate being photographed or videoed by customers for porn sites. Live-streaming was least indicated with 11 people (12%) who indicate live streaming sexual acts alone for customers and one (~1%) who indicate live streaming sexual acts with other people for customers.²⁰

Have the following ever happened to you?

Respondents were asked to indicate if any of the following had ever happened to them:

1. Unwanted pictures/video circulating on the internet
2. Personal information was disclosed to others
3. Bullied emotionally/stigmatized by customers

¹⁷ UN General Assembly, (2000). Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

¹⁸ Royal Thai Government, (2008). Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, B.E. 2551. [English Translation]

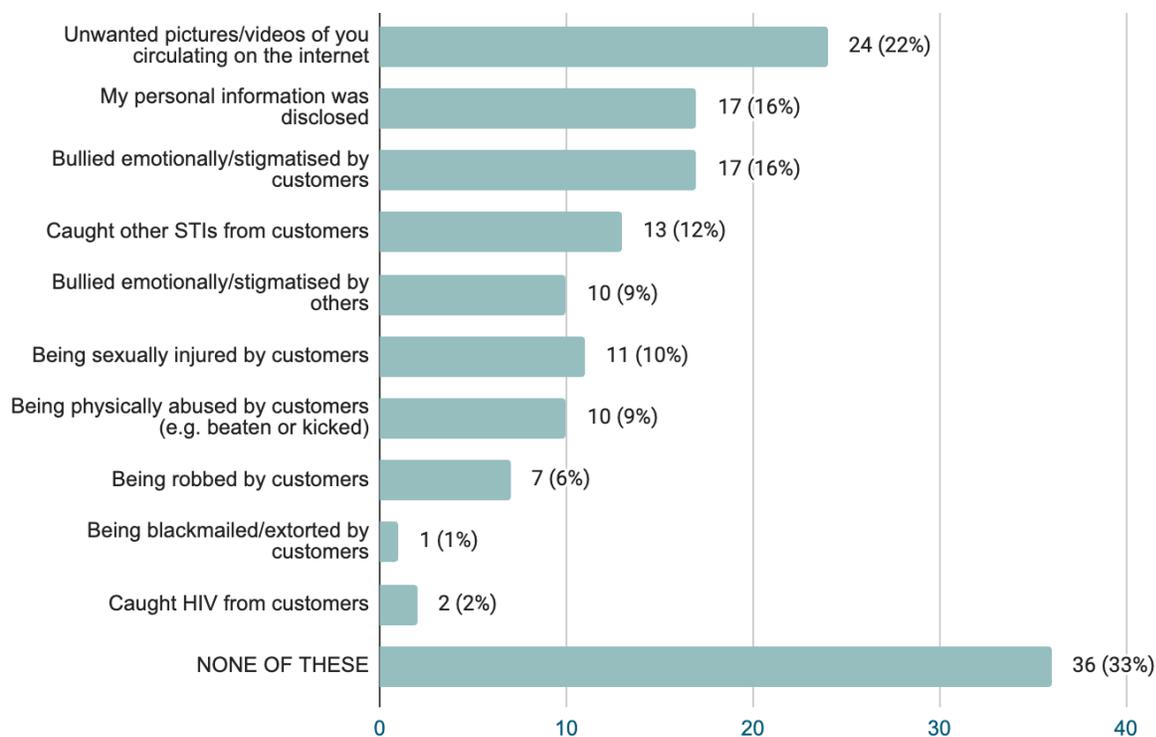
¹⁹ Although ‘customers’ may request photographs or videos for ‘personal use’, once they are sent, the individual(s) in the photos/videos cannot know for sure whether or not the files are shared publicly or among a group of friends, etc.

²⁰ Note that videos/images captured with customers for ‘private’ have significant potential and incentivization to become ‘public’ with or without the consent of the person depicted in the context. This may be especially important, considering potential monetization of ‘content creator’ accounts. Thus, the distinction between these two options is likely marginal in practice.

4. Caught other STIs from customers
5. Bullied emotionally/stigmatized by others
6. Being sexually injured or endangered by customers
7. Being physically abused by customers (e.g. beaten or kicked)
8. Being robbed by customers
9. Being blackmailed/extorted by customers
10. Caught HIV from customers

A third (33%) of all respondents noted that none of these events have ever happened to them. The most common event reported across gender identities was that unwanted pictures/videos of respondents were circulated on the internet (22%). Having their personal information was disclosed, and being bullied by customers was reported by 16% of respondents. 12% reported catching STIs from customers.

Figure 7. Have the following ever happened to you?



What did you do about it?

Among those who reported experiencing any of the events above, respondents were asked what they did about it²¹. All (100%) trans/third gender respondents reported doing something about the event whereas 42% (n = 18) of cisgender males reported doing nothing. Outlets to talk about these experiences vary significantly based on gender identity. Table 6 below outlines what respondents did after experiencing a negative event:

Table 6: What did you do after a negative experience?

	Trans/Third Gender	Cisgender Male	All Respondents
Do Nothing	0 (0%)	18 (42%)	36 (40%)
Tell a Friend/Family	12 (43%)	13 (30%)	25 (28%)
Inform the Police	12 (43%)	8 (19%)	20 (22%)
Notify an NGO	3 (11%)	3 (7%)	6 (7%)

Who chooses your clients?

To understand the level of personal agency held by respondents in choosing their clients, respondents were asked to identify who chooses their clients. Note that responses and descriptive statistics are not mutually exclusive as respondents were able to choose more than one option. Approximately three-fourths (76%, n = 72) of all respondents reported choosing at least some of their clients themselves. Trans/third gender respondents appear to more frequently get to choose customers themselves (84%, n = 41) compared to cisgender male respondents (67%, n = 31). Conversely, almost one-third of total respondents noted having a friend help them choose respondents (32%, n = 30), with this proportion being higher among cisgender male respondents (37%, n = 17) compared to trans/third gender respondents (27%, n = 13). Finally, 14% (n = 13) of respondents reported that a manager helped them choose their clients with half of these respondents being trans/third gender (12%, n = 6) and the other half being cisgender male (15%, n = 7).

How much of the money do you keep for yourself?

²¹ Participants were limited to one option from the options as detailed below, or could input their own custom answer.

More than half (52%) of respondents say that they are only able to keep a small part of their income for themselves, including 10 respondents (11%) who say that they do not keep any of the money that they earn. Nearly one in five respondents (19%) say that they are able to keep about half of the money they earn for themselves. About one in six (17%) say that they keep ‘most’ or ‘part’ of the money that they earn. Considering gender identity, trans/third gender respondents are somewhat more likely to keep a greater portion of the money they earn, with nearly one in four (22%) keeping all or most, another 22% keeping half, and more than half (53%) keeping only a small part of their income. Cisgender males in the sample appear to keep a smaller portion of the money they earned, with only two males (4%) keeping ‘all’ their money and four (9%) keeping ‘most’ of their money. **Further, all respondents who indicated they kept ‘none’ of the money they earned were cis-gender males.**

Method of receiving money online

Nearly all respondents (86%; n = 82) say that they receive the money that they earn directly into their bank accounts. Five of these respondents also receive cash, in addition to the money in their bank accounts. Four respondents with bank accounts also have digital wallets where they receive money. In addition, one respondent with a bank account also receives credit in an app, which can be withdrawn as cash.

There are 12 respondents (14%) who do not receive money into a bank account, seven of these only receive cash, three only receive money through a digital wallet, and one says they only receive money as digital credit in a particular app, which can then be withdrawn as money. One respondent did not respond.

Have you ever been forced to do something sexual that you didn't want to do?

Nearly two thirds of respondents (65%, n = 42) indicated that they had experiences in which they were forced to have sex against their wishes (they were raped). More than a third (35%) say that this happens only once in a while and less than a third say that this happens ‘sometimes’. Only one respondent reported that this happens ‘often.’ One in three (33%) respondents reported that this ‘never’ happens. Few notable differences are observed between trans/third gender and cisgender males, with trans/third gender respondents being slightly more likely than males to indicate that they have ‘never’ been forced (35% to 30%, respectively)²².

²² This question was intentionally worded to ensure accuracy. Specifically, given known hesitation to identify forced sex as rape, and the fact that participants may have different understandings of ‘rape’ and ‘sexual assault’ (e.g. it can only happen to women, there must be a violent struggle involved), the current survey question asked about being “forced to have sex.”

Work Concerns

Respondents were asked to rate their level of worry about nine different issues related to their interactions with clients. Issues of concern include:

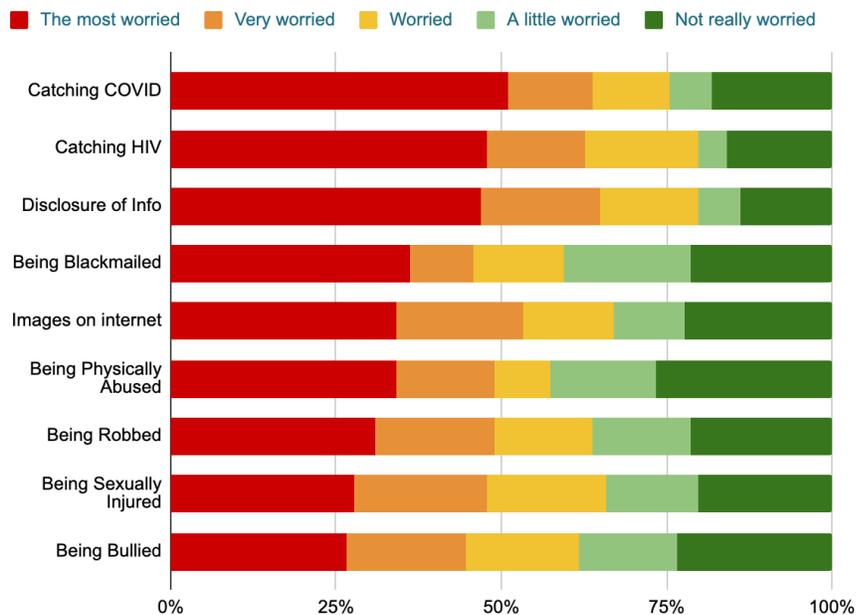
1. having their images released on the internet,
2. having their personal information disclosed,
3. catching COVID-19 from clients,
4. catching HIV from clients,
5. being sexually injured by a client,
6. being physically abused by a client,
7. being blackmailed by a client,
8. being robbed by a client, and
9. being bullied by a client.

Among all respondents, the highest levels of concern were related to the possibility of:

1. catching COVID 19 from clients,
2. catching HIV from clients, and
3. having personal information disclosed to others.

Conversely, respondents reported the least amount of concern related to the risk of being physically abused by clients, and being blackmailed by clients. In total, about a fifth reported they were “not really worried” about each concern option. The weight of disclosure of personal information to others is particularly noteworthy given that, across service providers, the majority of services currently available to respondents focus on physical and sexual health resources. Though these remain valuable resources, the current results also point to the need for resources related to keeping personal information safe.

Figure 8. How much are you presently concerned about the following issues? (All respondents)



Several significant differences are evident when considering the level of concern across gender identity of respondents. The top three issues expressed by male (n = 43), third gender (n = 34), and transgender (n = 14) respondents are outlined in Table 7. Of note, the data shows that trans/third gender respondents were much more likely to be “most concerned” about images of them circulating on the internet (41%, n = 20), in comparison to cisgender male respondents (26%, n = 12).

Table 7: Top 3 concerns of respondents by gender.

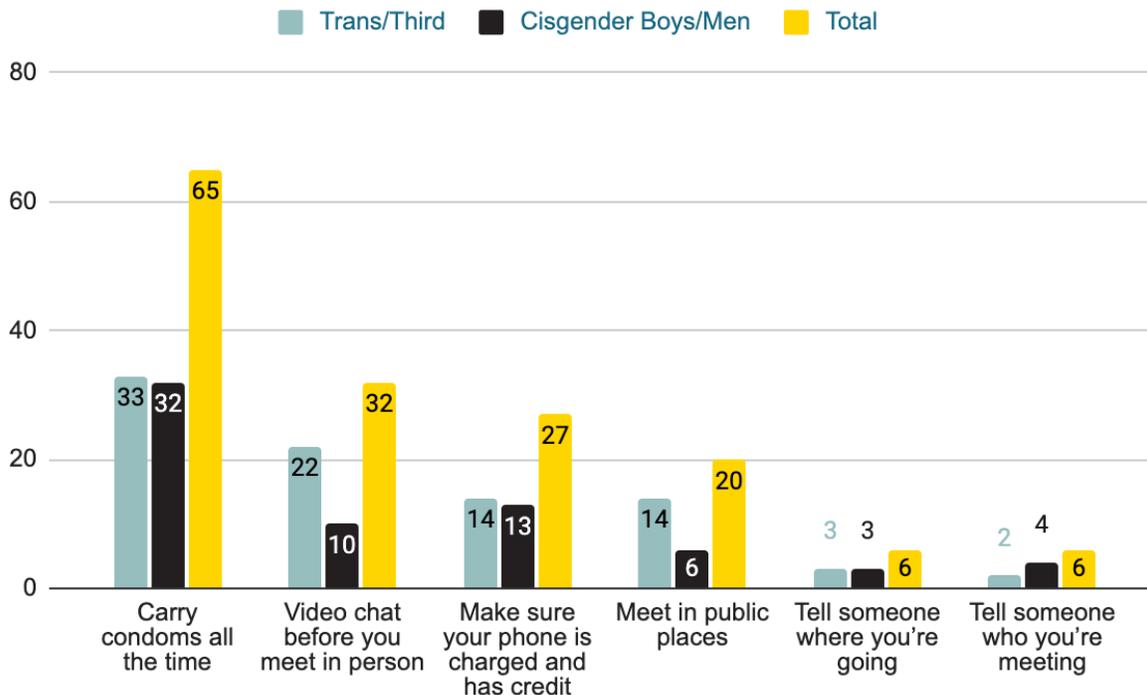
	Cisgender Male	Third Gender	Transgender
1	Disclosure of Personal Information	Catching COVID-19 from Clients	My Images Circulating on the Internet
2	Catching COVID-19 from Clients	Catching HIV from Clients	Catching COVID-19 from Clients
3	Catching HIV from Clients	Disclosure of Personal Information	Disclosure of Personal Information Catching COVID-19 from Clients Being Physically Abused Being Robbed

Physical & Emotional Safety

Sexual Health

When asked to identify all of the ways they keep themselves safe before meeting with customers, 68% (n = 65) reported that they carry condoms at all times. A third (34%; n = 32) reported that they video chat with the customer before meeting with them in person to keep safe. 28% (n = 27) reported they make sure their phone is charged and has credit on it and 21% (n = 20) reported meeting their customers in public spaces. Only 6% of respondents (n = 6) reported that they let people know where they are going and/or who they are meeting with prior to meeting with customers.

Figure 9. What safety measures do you take before meeting clients?



Across gender identity, carrying condoms all of the time remained the most frequent safety measure endorsed by both trans/third gender (67%, n = 33) and cisgender Male (70%, n = 32) respondents. Notably, trans/third gender respondents were more than twice as likely to note that they video chat before meeting in person with a client (45% n = 22) or meet in public places (29%, n = 14) compared to cisgender males (22%, n = 10; 13%, n = 6, respectively).

Emotional Health

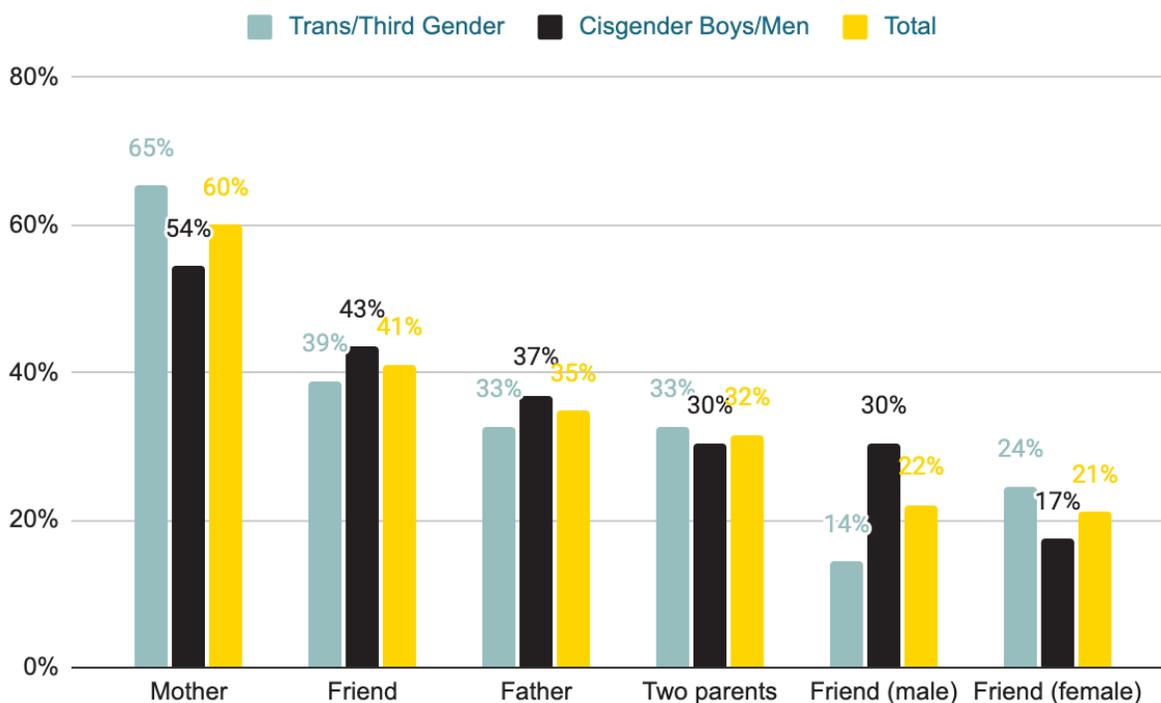
Trustworthy person growing up?

Respondents were asked to identify people that were trustworthy to them growing up. Approximately one-third of respondents noted that their friend was a trustworthy person growing up (32%, n = 30), followed closely by their mother (29%, n = 27), and both of their parents (25%, n = 24). Only 6% (n = 6) of respondents noted their father as a trustworthy person while growing up.

Who do you go to for problems now?

When asked to identify all people respondents go to with their problems, all respondents identified at least one individual with the majority saying more than one individual that they could go to with their problems now. The pattern of responses outlined below were relatively consistent across gender identities with the majority of respondents identifying their mother as the person they go to with their problems now. Figure 9 outlines the percentage of respondents who noted all other options.

Figure 10. Who do you go to for problems now?

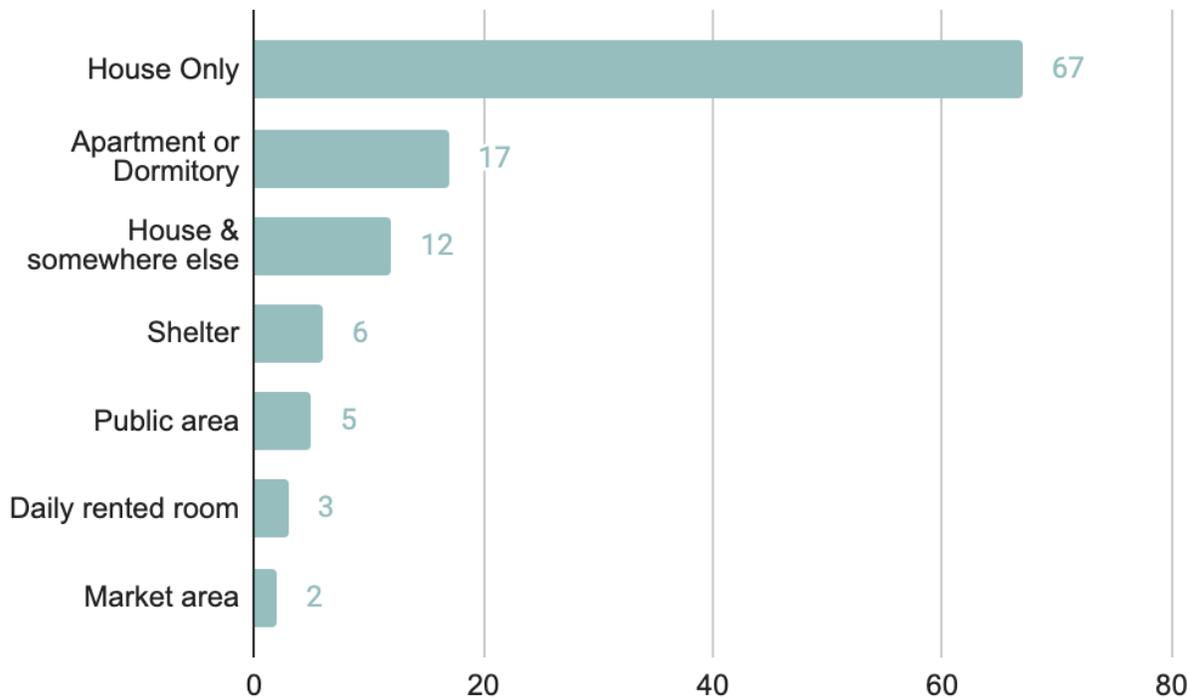


Type of home growing up

Respondents were also asked what type of homes they lived in growing up and were given the option to choose more than one type of home. The vast majority of respondents grew up in a house (71%, n = 67) at one point in their childhood. Less than one fifth 18% (n = 17) said they grew up in an apartment or dormitory and 13% (n = 12) grew up in a house but also moved to somewhere else during their childhood years. Finally, less than 10% of respondents grew up in a shelter (6%, n = 6), public area (5%, n = 5), daily rented room (3%, n = 3) or market area (2%, n = 2).

There were significant differences in types of home respondents grew up in based on their gender identity. Specifically, only one trans/third gender respondent reported growing up in a shelter, public area, and daily rented room each and no trans/third gender respondents reported growing up in a market area. Conversely, a total of 24% of cisgender male respondents reported growing up in one of these types of homes (shelter = 11%, public area = 9%, daily rented room = 4%, market area = 4%). Further, trans/third gender respondents were more likely to report growing up in a house (78%, n = 38) compared to cisgender male respondents (63%, n = 29).

Figure 11. What type of home did you live in growing up?



Who did you live with growing up?

When asked about who they lived with while growing up during childhood, the majority of respondents noted that they lived with immediate family (71%, n = 67). Trans/third gender respondents were more likely to note living with family (78%, n = 38) or relatives (12%, n = 6) compared to cisgender male respondents. In fact, cisgender males were more likely to report living alone (15%, n = 7) or with friends (15%, n = 7) while growing up.

Did you live with the same group of people?

In addition to who they grew up with, respondents were asked if they lived with these people consistently while growing up or if they experienced moving to live with other people in other places. The majority of respondents across gender identity reported that they lived with the same group of people consistently while growing up (73%, n = 69). Cisgender males were more likely to report having moved around while growing up (28%, n = 15) compared to trans/third gender respondents (12%, n = 6).

Perception of Safety

Respondents were presented with six scenarios and asked to rate whether they agree or disagree that the characters in each scenario were victims, perpetrators, or facilitators. Only slightly more than one in four (28%) were able to identify sexual exploitation in any of the scenarios. The respondents were only able to identify sexual exploitation in slightly more than 28% of scenarios. The definition of sexual exploitation can be included as part of wider rights-based training workshops for UL clients.

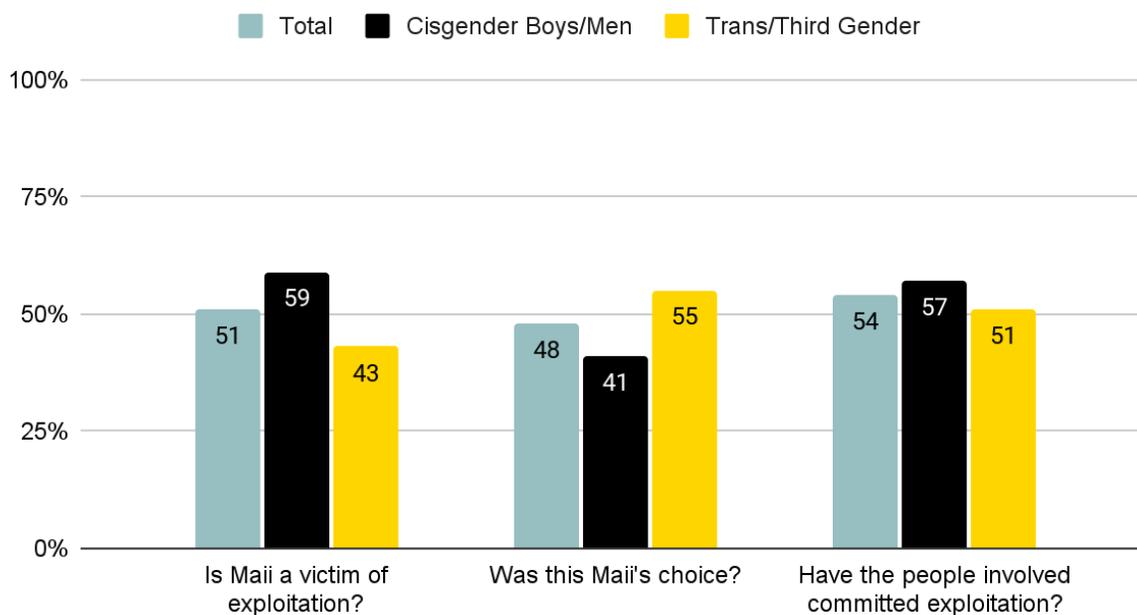
Scenario one: Maii

Maii is 17 years old, and identifies as a transgender person. Maii used to live in the countryside but faced discrimination from family and neighbours, so moved to the city to start a new life. Maii has not been able to find work and is homeless, so sleeps in a pagoda temporarily. Maii needs money to pay for food and for studies, so quite often meets men and sometimes women, and has sex with them for payment. Maii accepts that this life is tough but accepts this situation, because Maii wants to build a better future.

Slightly more than half (51%) of respondents believe that Maii has experienced sexual exploitation, with 12 (13%) saying that they 'strongly agree' and more than a third (38%) saying they 'agree.' Nearly half (48%) believe that Maii has not experienced sexual exploitation, with six people (6%) saying they strongly disagree that Maii has been exploited (see Figure 11).

When asked if they believe that this is Maii's choice to have sex with men and women for payment, the majority (76%) believe that it is. More than half of respondents (54%) believe that the men and women that Maii meets have committed sexual exploitation.

Figure 12. Affirmative responses for all three questions (Maii).



Considering gender identity, trans/third gender respondents were somewhat less likely to believe that Maii was a victim with 55% believing Maii was not exploited, comparison with 41% of cisgender males. Similarly, trans/third gender respondents were somewhat more likely to believe that this was Maii's choice (80%, in comparison to 72% among cisgender males). Slightly more than half of both groups believe that the people involved have committed exploitation, with cisgender males slightly more likely to perceive them as exploiters (57%, in comparison to 51%).

Scenario two: Jay

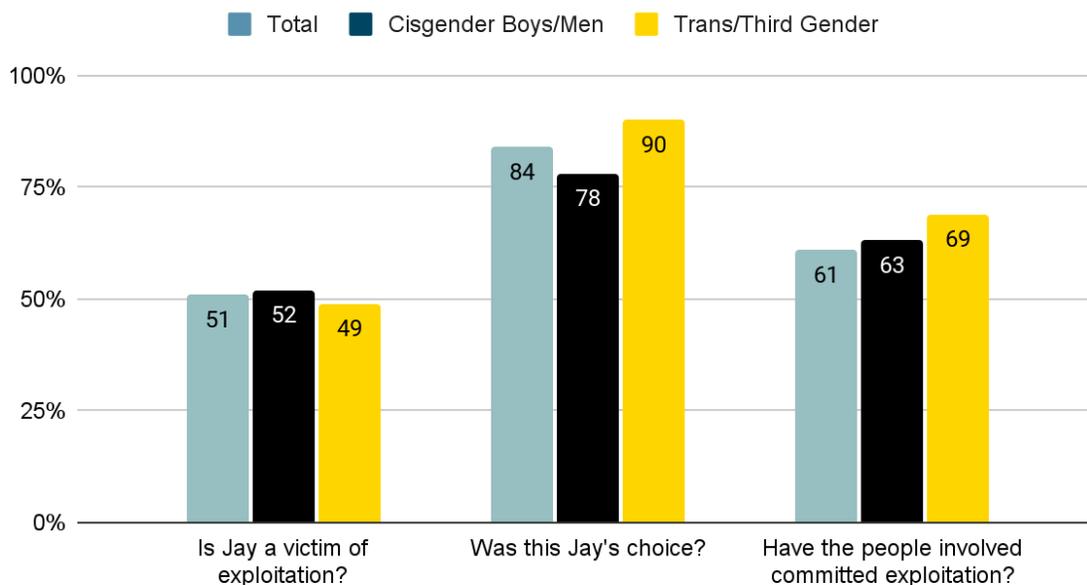
Jay is almost 15 years old, although he looks older; he self-identifies as gay and appears confident in his sexuality. On the weekends, he often meets older men, who he describes as his 'boyfriends': He has sex with them and receives payment and sometimes gifts. When asked about this, Jay says that this is his choice and that other people should mind their own business.

Similarly, slightly more than half (51%) of respondents believe that Jay has experienced sexual exploitation, with 10 (11%) saying that they 'strongly agree' and 40% saying they 'agree'. Nearly half

(48%) believe that he has not experienced sexual exploitation, with five people (5%) saying they strongly disagree that Jay has been exploited (see figure x.x).

When asked if they believe that this is Jay's choice to have sex with men and women for payment, most respondents (84%) believe that it is Jay's choice. Nearly two-in-three (61%) believe that the older men that Jay meets on weekends have committed sexual exploitation with 14 (15%) saying they 'strongly agree' that they have and nearly half (46%) saying that they 'agree.'

Figure 13. Affirmative responses for all three questions (Jay).



Similar findings are seen across gender identity with cisgender males slightly more likely to believe that Jay was a victim. However, trans/third gender respondents were more likely than cisgender males to believe that this was Jay's choice (90%, in comparison to 78% among cisgender males). The majority of both groups believe that the people involved have committed exploitation, with cisgender males somewhat more likely to perceive them as exploiters (63%, in comparison to 59%).

Scenario three: Ploy

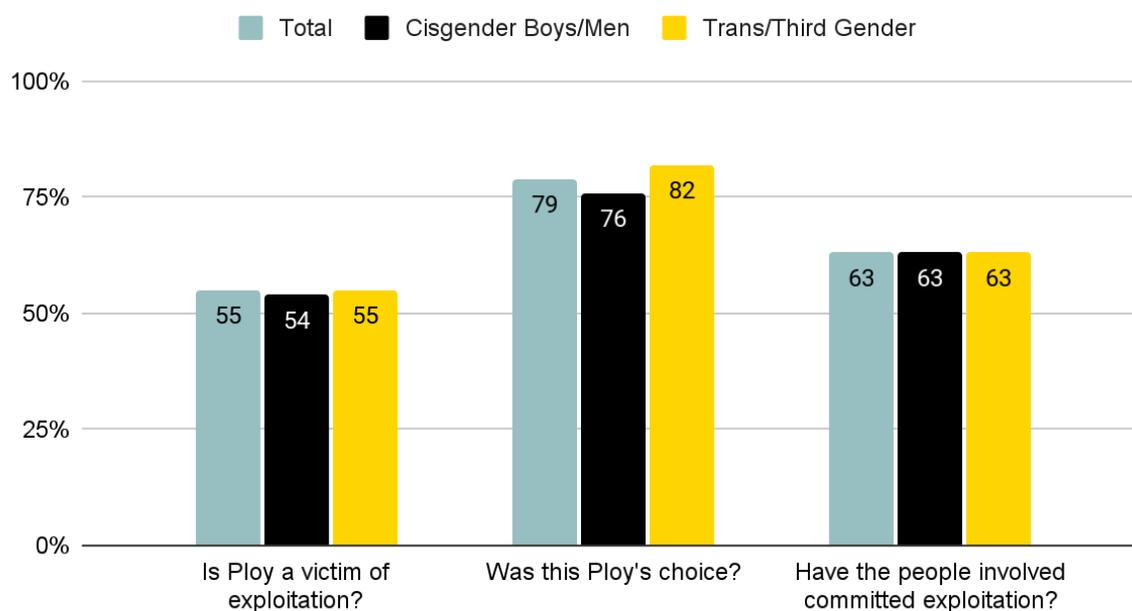
Ploy is a 15-yr. old girl, lives with a sick aunt, meets with older boys and men online at night in exchange for money to help take care of her aunt. She keeps this secret from her aunt. She understands that this is not an ideal situation, but believes it's the right thing to do so she can help her aunt.

More than half (55%) of respondents believe that Ploy has experienced sexual exploitation, with 12 (13%) saying that they 'strongly agree' and 42% saying they 'agree.' Less than half (44%) believe that

Ploy has not experienced sexual exploitation, with three people (3%) saying they strongly disagree that Ploy has been exploited (see Figure 13).

When asked if they believe that it is Ploy's choice to meet with the boys and men online in exchange for money, the majority (79%) believe that it is Ploy's choice. Nearly two in three (63%) believe that the boys and men that she meets online have committed sexual exploitation, with nearly one in six (16%) 'strongly' agreeing, and nearly half (47%) agreeing.

Figure 14. Affirmative responses for all three questions (Ploy).



As above, similar findings are seen across gender identity with trans/third-gender respondents only slightly more likely to believe that Ploy was a victim. Conversely, trans/third gender respondents were also more likely than cisgender males to believe that this was Ploy's choice (82%) in comparison to cisgender males (76%). Identical majorities of both groups believe that the people involved have committed exploitation, with 63% of both groups believing that they had.

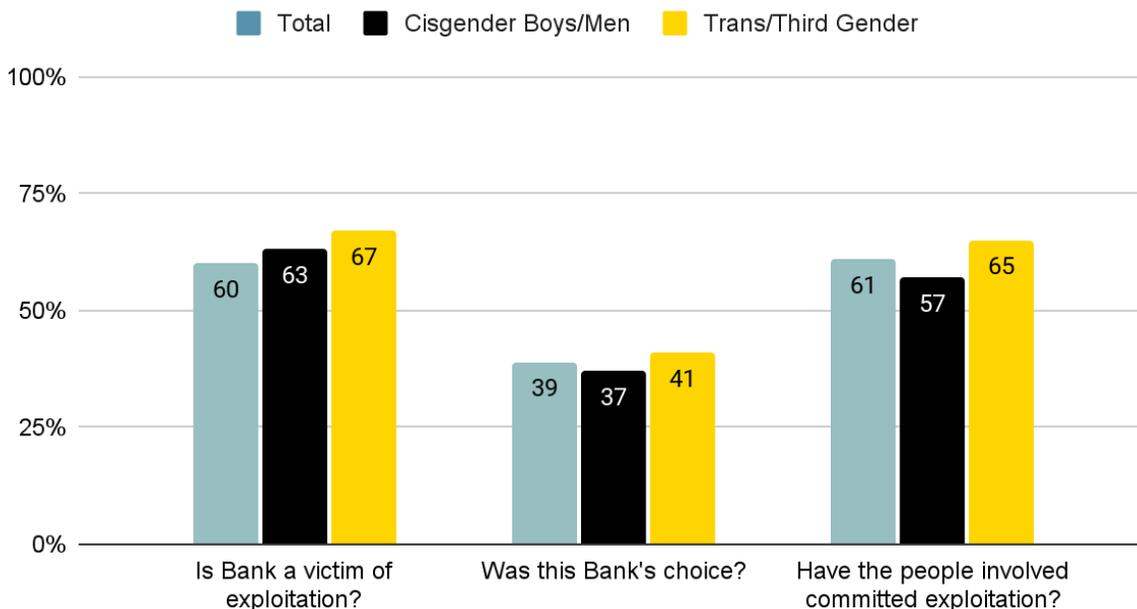
Scenario four: Bank

Bank is a 15-year-old boy. He doesn't get along with his step-father, so he ran away to Bangkok where he lives with three other friends. To help pay for food and rent, he sleeps with older men that he meets outside of a local bar. He needs the money and believes he's tough enough to handle this situation.

Less than two thirds (60%) of respondents believe that Bank has experienced sexual exploitation, with 13 (14%) saying that they ‘strongly agree’ and 44% saying they ‘agree.’ Thirty-seven respondents (40%) believe that Bank has not experienced sexual exploitation, with one person (1%) strongly disagreeing that he has been exploited (see Figure 14).

When asked if they believe that it is Bank’s choice to sleep with older men that he meets for money, most (82%) believe that it is Bank’s choice. Nearly two in three (61%) believe that the older men that he meets have committed sexual exploitation, with slightly more than half (51%) agreeing, and ten (11%) ‘strongly’ agreeing.

Figure 15. Affirmative responses for all three questions (Bank).



Cisgender male respondents were somewhat more likely to believe that Bank was a victim with 63% believing he was exploited, comparison with 57% of trans/third gender respondents. Similarly, cisgender males were less likely to believe that this was Bank’s choice (37%, in comparison to 41% among trans/third gender respondents). Trans/third gender respondents were more likely than cisgender males to believe that the people involved have committed sexual exploitation (65%, in comparison to 57% among cisgender males).

Negative Experiences

Following the questions regarding worries about their work, respondents were asked which of these events would be serious enough that they would report it to someone else. Results revealed that respondents were most likely to report to someone when their images were circulated on the

internet (56%, n = 53) though trans/third gender respondents were more likely to report this (67%, n = 33) compared to cisgender males (43%, n = 20). There were also significant differences by gender in what respondents considered serious enough to report. Trans/third gender respondents were more likely to report incidences in which they a) caught HIV from clients, b) were sexually injured by customers, c) were robbed by customers or d) were being stigmatized by customers. Cisgender males by contrast were more likely to report disclosure of personal information but were generally less likely to report almost all incidences compared to trans/third gender respondents.

When asked to whom they would report incidents like the ones in the scenarios, the most frequent response was that they would report to the police (41%, n = 39). This is followed by reporting to a police station (25%, n = 24). Less than 10% of respondents would report to any other source including a doctor (2%, n = 2), or foundation (6%, n = 6). Of note, only 5% of respondents noted that they would report the incident to the 191 emergency number (police hotline). **Older respondents (over the age of 24) were more likely to report that they didn't know where to go to report any of these scenarios compared to you.**

Finally, respondents were asked what would (be most likely to) encourage them to report these events. Respondents were only allowed to select one answer, or enter their own custom answer. Consistent across gender identities, 34% (n = 32) of all respondents noted that being able to remain anonymous would encourage them to report events. Having an NGO to report to (27%, n = 26) and having legal support (a lawyer to help, 23%, n = 22) were also heavily endorsed as an option that would encourage reporting. Lastly, compensation was noted as an encouraging factor primarily for cisgender males (20%, n = 9) compared to trans/third gender respondents (4%, n = 2).

Accessing Support Services

If you need help (food, shelter, etc.) who would you go to?

When asked who they would go to for help if they needed it, slightly less than one-half of respondents reported they would go to their family (46%, n = 44). Going to a family member was reported more frequently for trans/third gender respondents (55%, n = 27) compared to cisgender male respondents (37%, n = 17). Across gender identities approximately a third of respondents reported that they would go to a friend (29%, n = 28), 19% (n = 18) reported they would go to an organization, and 4% (n = 4) reported they didn't know where they would go if they needed help. Notably, all of the responses where respondents didn't know where to go for help came from cisgender male respondents.

Knowledge, Use, and Perceptions of Service Providers

The majority of respondents reported learning about service providers that could provide them help from their friends (73%, n = 69). Additional outlets for information about service providers included respondents' colleagues (32%, n = 30), a sexual health program (23%, n = 22), advertisements (18%, n = 17), and outreach workers (15%, n = 14). Finally, a small number of respondents reported learning about service organizations through their family (4%, n = 4).

Regardless of how they learned about the support services, only 51% (n = 48) of respondents reported that they had ever received services from any organization. When asked why they didn't receive services from these organizations, 21% (n = 20) of respondents reported that they didn't need the help or service. Only 11% (n = 10) didn't qualify for services and so didn't receive them. Of note, cisgender male respondents were more likely to indicate that they did not meet the criteria for services (15%, n = 7) compared to trans/third gender respondents (6%, n = 3). This exclusion of males from services, and especially services aimed at helping sex trafficking survivors, is not an unknown phenomenon. Cisgender females remain the target population for the majority of anti-trafficking efforts across Thailand and the globe²³, often to the exclusion of both cisgender males and trans/third gender people who may benefit from services and/or assistance.

Finally, respondents were asked about their perceptions of the organizations they knew of that provided services. Specifically, if they agreed or disagreed with the following statements 1) the organization was helpful, 2) the staff understood what I needed, 3) I was able to get the help I needed, 4) the staff was judgmental, 5) the staff didn't care about me and 6) I didn't meet the criteria for services.

Overall, the majority of respondents noted that the organization was helpful (88%, n = 84), understood what they needed (88%, n = 84) and offered the help that was needed (85%, n = 81). However, a similar majority of respondents also endorsed that the staff was judgmental towards them (80%, n = 76), with a smaller percentage noting that the staff didn't care about them (34%, n = 32). Though the pattern of responses was similar, the frequency of agreement differed greatly based on respondents' gender identity. Specifically, cisgender males overall reported less positive perceptions of organizations and their staff and were more likely to endorse that the staff did not care about them or that they didn't meet the criteria for services. The one exception to this pattern was that trans/third gender respondents more often noted that staff was judgmental (86%, n = 42) compared to cisgender males (74%, n = 34).

²³ Josenhans et al., (2020). [Gender, rights and responsibilities: The need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys.](#)

Challenges to Opening Up to Service Providers

Respondents were also asked what they thought would be some of the biggest challenges to opening up to service providers. The most frequent challenge noted was the taboo surrounding sex and sexuality (57%, n = 54). This feeling of taboo was consistent across gender identity (trans/third gender = 57%, cisgender male = 57%) as the largest challenge to opening up to service providers.

The next most frequent challenge noted by all respondents was feeling that no one would understand them (18%, n = 17). This feeling was endorsed more frequently by cisgender males (22%, n = 10) than trans/third gender respondents (14%, n = 7). Additionally, there were several more challenges noted more often by cisgender Males when compared to trans/third gender respondents including worry about their immigration/legal status, and not wanting these experiences to define them. Finally, there were a couple of challenges to opening up that were exclusively noted by either trans/third gender respondents (ethnicity/cultural identity differences) or cisgender males (growing up it was normal for family members to touch my genitals, seeking help is a sign of “weakness”). Taken together, these findings point to a strong influence of gender norms, especially when looking at the challenges noted by cisgender male respondents.

Considering their preferred gender of support worker (in the event that they need to seek services), respondents show a range of preferences with nearly a third (29%, n=30) indicating that the gender of support worker didn't matter to them. This is most commonly observed among trans or third gender respondents, where more than a third of the sample (37%, n=26) indicated that they did not have a preference and more than a quarter (26%, n=18) said that they would prefer to work with a man. A fifth (20%, n=14) preferred talking to a woman, and eight (11%) preferred to speak with a trans/third gender support worker. **Cisgender male respondents showed greater preference for gender of support worker**, with nearly half (45%, n=30) saying that they would prefer to work with someone who was also male and a fifth (20%, n=16) said they would prefer to work with a woman. Lastly, three cisgender male respondents (5%) said that they would prefer to work with someone who was trans or third gender.

Assisting Someone Who Wishes to Leave the Sex Industry

Finally, respondents were given the option to write in a response to the questions “how could (we) help people who do not want to start work in the sex industry?” and “how could (we) help people who want to get out of work in the sex industry?” There was a range of responses to these questions. For example, there were several respondents who noted more hands-off approaches to helping others, reporting that providers should let them do what they want.

While responses to these questions largely focused on advocacy or advice-giving to effected young people, along with the provision of jobs and resources, it is notable that when asked the reasons why they trade sex, 14% (n=15) say that they enjoy the work, a majority (79%) indicate the ability to earn money a reason (among others) that they remain in the sex trade.

However, when asked how to help people who don't want to start or want to get out, respondents reported that finding people good employment opportunities and/or providing them with opportunities for education and training would be helpful to keep people from starting in the sex industry. Additionally, an overwhelming number of respondents noted that telling people of the realities of what it's like to be in the sex industry would help people who don't want to start. Some specific responses in this theme included:

<i>“Give advice about the consequences that will follow after not protecting yourself”</i>	<i>“(I) want them to know that HIV is easy to contract, they should be somewhat fearful of that”</i>	<i>“Tell them about the evil things I’ve encountered”</i>	<i>“Tell them about the negative experiences”</i>
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This themes of finding employment, and sharing the negative experiences, consequences, and ‘evil’ in the sex industry were also major themes of responses when respondents were asked how to help people who want to get out of the sex industry. Specifically, respondents noted that we should:

<i>“Go on and have a better life than this. Don’t do this at all. It’s torture for the mind and body”</i>	<i>“Tell and share”</i>	<i>“Help them escape”</i>
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One respondent stated:

<i>“Don’t let them play on dating apps, don’t let them meet people from apps”</i>

Finally, across both questions, respondents repeated a sense of not knowing exactly what could be done to help people who wish to not enter or get out of the sex industry.

Review/Overview of Key Findings

This study sought to gather and disseminate foundational information regarding the current status of online sexual exploitation of boys, young men, and trans/third gender people in Thailand. This information will then be used to identify and protect children from human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children both online and offline. Using a seed-based recruitment method and comprehensive online survey collection, responses revealed several key findings and takeaways including:

The Internet and its Role in the Sex Trade

- **Few differences exist between those who use online sites to connect with customers and those who meet offline.** The use of online sites to connect with customers and then engaging in exchange sex in person was commonly reported among respondents.
- **Almost half of respondents (43%)** reported sending sexualized photos or videos to customers, representing the most commonly reported online activity when engaging with customers.
- **Cisgender boys were more frequently exploited before the age of 18 (45%) when compared to trans/third gender respondents (18%).** There is a need to educate boys and other children on the challenges and risks of connecting online.

Economic Context

- **More than half (52%) of respondents say they are only able to keep a small part of their income for themselves** (11% said that they do not keep any money themselves). This finding likely indicates exploitation by others and/or that respondents are supporting their families due to poverty.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant decrease in sex trade available and often a complete elimination of income for many respondents.** This increases vulnerability and can lead to more risky ways to find sex trade.
- **The majority of respondents noted additional sources of income outside of sex trade.** Perhaps these additional sources can be capitalized on when seeking to expand employment opportunities for people with similar life experiences to the respondents of this research project.
- **The inherent challenges of working in the sex trade leads survivors to recommend offering alternative income opportunities was highly recommended as a way to combat exploitation.** Nearly one-in-four (24%) of respondents also reported difficulty holding down another job as a reason for engaging in exchange sex, pointing to a need for increased training and educational opportunities to promote success in avenues respondents are interested in working in.

Gender

- **There were multiple differences in the experiences of cisgender boys/males and trans/third gender people.** The voices and experiences of both of these marginalized groups are essential to combatting trafficking of all people and more funding and services are needed to address the needs of both cisgender boys/men and trans/third gender people.
- **Gender-based expectations and norms contribute to high rates of exclusion felt in social services and support.** Anti-trafficking and other services still overwhelmingly serve exclusively cisgender women, leading to feelings of stigma and exclusion among cisgender men and trans/third gender people who are victims of sexual exploitation.
- **Increased access to inclusive and supportive services are needed to serve cisgender men and trans/third gender people.** This does not mean to segregate services based on gender, but instead that services should be inclusive of gender while also adapting and responding to the specific needs of survivors based on their gender.

Safety

- **Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65%) indicated that they had been forced to have sex against their wishes.** This demonstrates the power differentials between customers and clients and also the need for strategies for respondents to learn how to protect themselves and extricate themselves from abusive and potentially abusive situations without risking losing customers.
- **Online and in-person sex trade carry their own unique risks.** However, concern about all of these risks among respondents was low. This indicates the need for boys, young men, and trans/third gender children and adults to understand the risks so that they can make more informed decisions.
- **Homelessness can begin a cycle of instability and vulnerability to sexual exploitation.** Experiencing homelessness may lead to concerns about finding somewhere to sleep that is inside rather than outside. Because of those risks people are more likely to seek sex in exchange for somewhere safe to sleep. This interconnection has also been recognized
 - *“In the past we have seen group activists and legislators fighting human trafficking, while others of us are working tirelessly to end homelessness. But the two are interlinked. What is important is identifying the problem, and in this case the problem is trafficked persons experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, and those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity being at risk for trafficking. Two intersecting issues, and the issues should not be examined separately. Rather the problem of human trafficking and its relationship to homelessness should be looked at as one.”²⁴*

²⁴ UNANIMA International (2021). [The Intersections of Family Homelessness and Human Trafficking](#).

Connecting to Support Services

- **Respondents repeatedly reported experiencing stigma and prejudice when attempting to access support services.** To ensure equitable services for all survivors more focus is needed on service provider training and combating stigma and prejudice happening within service spaces.
- **Respondents reported multiple ways they wanted to tell people about their experience to help others avoid exploitation and abuse.**
 - Two respondents noted speaking to people about the 'pros and cons', others talked about the risks, one said "it's torture for the body, it's torture for the mind"
 - Multiple respondents said they didn't know how to help, but many people said "tell them", "advise", "don't invite them to do it" etc.
- **Many youth reported wanting frank and honest conversations about the realities of "this work".** Service providers, therefore, need to be comfortable and ready to have and respond to these conversations in a supportive, non-judgmental way.

Discussion

This study's findings reflect existing knowledge on the pervasive influence of the internet and online media in the lives of boys and young men who exchange sex²⁵. Nearly all respondents (95%) experienced engaging with sex buyers or providing sexual services online. As previous research has established,^{26 27} the use of the internet to facilitate sex trade among adults and children has been increasing in recent years. The rise of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the pace of this pattern as most respondents reported a significant decrease or complete disappearance in income since the beginning of the pandemic. In addition to the increased risk of exploitation related to employment or income, the COVID-19 pandemic has also brought on the additional health risk of catching COVID-19 while interacting with a customer in-person. As such, many who use exchange sex as their primary source of income are turning to online sources.²⁸

Online Sex Trade/Sexual Exploitation

Respondents reported high levels of engagement in both online and in-person sex trade.

Though some have previously hypothesized that in-person and online sex buyers are separate populations,²⁹ this was not reflected in the sample. The majority of respondents reported using both in-person and online methods of engaging with customers. Apps and websites used to connect with their clients varied widely. Only two in three (65%) responded to questions about the apps they used to connect with customers.

[Results regarding specific app usage has been redacted]

The Internet is a common place to learn about, and enter the sex trade.

Specifically, online sites were the second most common place noted to learn about the sex industry after adult friends. These sites pose a unique challenge for their potential for recruitment and grooming of children and young people for sexual exploitation. For example, a child may enter these sites for the purpose of meeting friends, or connecting with a community only to come into contact with someone who proposes entrance into the sex industry and/or a sexually exploitative relationship with a child.

²⁵ Josenhans, et al., (2020). [Gender, rights and responsibilities: The need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys.](#)

²⁶ Cunningham, & Kendall, (2011). [Prostitution 2.0: The changing face of sex work.](#)

²⁷ Grubb, (2020). [The Rise of Sex Trafficking Online.](#)

²⁸ Cunningham, & Kendall, (2011). [Prostitution 2.0: The changing face of sex work.](#)

²⁹ Ibid, 2011.

When asked about the kinds of online sexual activities they had participated in, respondents most commonly reported sending sexual photos or videos to customers (43%). Other common activities included being photographed or videoed by a customer for their own personal use (26%), being photographed or videoed by customers for porn sites (17%), and to a lesser extent, live streaming sexual acts alone for customers (12%). Though respondents appeared forthcoming with their reporting of these activities, the results should be viewed with caution. In particular, it is very possible that respondents have had these activities happen to them without their knowledge. For example, even though someone may have sent photographs to a customer personally, it is possible that this customer could have shared these photographs with others, uploaded them to a website, or sold them to other parties.

Finally, almost a third of all respondents met the Palermo Protocol definition for sex trafficking victim (i.e. they reported beginning to trade sex online prior to the age of 18). This finding was true of just under half (45%) of cisgender male respondents and 18% of trans/third gender respondents in this study. Though further research is needed, these findings suggest that online sexual exploitation of children (OCSE) remains pervasive and in need of continued and urgent intervention across all gender identities.

Taken together, findings reveal the urgent need to continue to pursue and adapt current practices to meet the challenges of the expanding landscape of OCSE and exchange sex.

Economic Context

While this may not be normative in all contexts, this study found that trans & third gender respondents were somewhat older than cisgender (including gay) males and were among the highest earners in the study with four indicating weekly earnings of 10k (n=2), 20k (n=1), and 40k (n=1). Considering all respondents, 18% (n = 12) reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability either currently (10%) and/or while growing up (12%)³⁰. Among the 44 whose age was below the UN definition of youth (15-24 years), more than half lived with their parents and one-in-five (20%) lived alone. Trans/third gender respondents in this group were three times more likely to live alone (11%), in comparison to cisgender males (35%) who most commonly lived with parents or friends. Cisgender males in this group were also more likely to indicate housing instability growing up (n=10, in comparison to n=2) and were the only participants to indicate currently living in daily rental housing (n = 4) or on the street (n = 1).

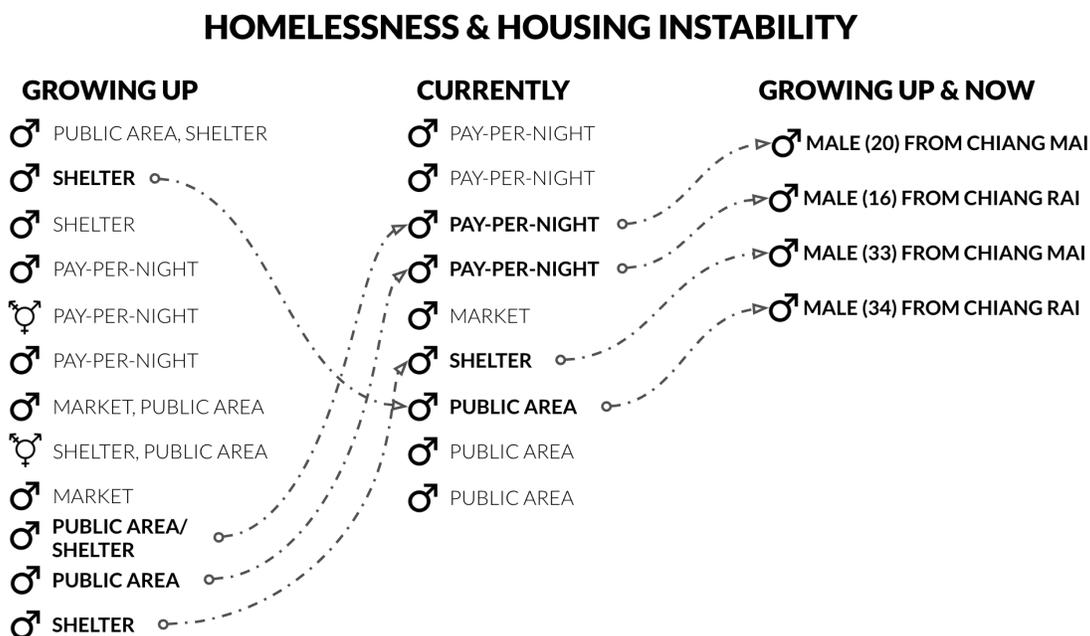
While “housing instability” lacks a standardized definition, it encompasses a variety of conditions including struggling to pay for rent, having inconsistent or temporary housing, such as the

³⁰ Respondents were identified as being homeless or having housing instability if they reported living on the streets, in a shelter, or in a daily rented room.

respondents in the sample that live in daily or weekly rented rooms. It also includes situations where the bulk of one's limited income is spent on housing, thus depriving them of other necessities for survival. Housing instability is commonly associated with a myriad of other issues, including lack of access to healthcare and diminished physical and mental health outcomes.

All respondents who described current homelessness or housing instability were young men including four who were staying in 'pay per day' housing, two slept in a public area, another two slept in a market, and one was staying in a shelter. In total, nine people were currently experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Looking at their experiences growing up, 12 people (10 young men and two trans/third gender respondents) indicate homelessness or housing instability. Only four respondents (all young men) indicated experiencing homelessness during both periods: currently and growing up (see Figure 16).

Figure 17. Respondents homelessness & housing instability.



Noting the four respondents who experienced homelessness and housing instability both growing up as well as currently, three of the four describe living in shelters as children and one lived on the street. Presently, only one still lives in a shelter, while two pay nightly for a place to sleep and one (formerly in a shelter) now sleeps on the street. While the data is insufficient to make any corollary claims, it is notable that those who had shelters available as children, may no longer be eligible for such services due to aging out of social programming designed for children.

Homeless³¹ and housing instability³² can uniquely contribute to a variety of risks and consequences for young people who trade sex.

Though it's difficult to know which comes first in time, homelessness understandably may lead a young person to be concerned about finding an indoor place to sleep for the night to avoid sleeping outdoors. In this situation, one might see exchanging sex for someplace safe to stay as one of, if not their only option for the night. Relatedly, being homeless and/or having no place to sleep makes a young person particularly vulnerable to coercion of a trafficker or client who will provide them a place to sleep for doing something that young person would not otherwise choose to do. This scenario can repeat itself enough that it becomes somewhat of a norm amongst peer groups of young people, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation.

On the other hand, it is also possible that sexual exploitation can lead one indirectly to homelessness and/or housing instability. For example, as shown in this study and in previous literature³³, children who are sexually exploited are at a higher risk for substance use, which may cause them to lose their job or income, and subsequently end up in an unstable housing situation. Further, a child who is sexually exploited may experience stigma from their family and/or community like that mentioned by respondents in the current study. This stigma can not only impact the mental health of the child, but may also lead to the family disowning and/or kicking the child out of their family housing, leaving the child on their own to find a safe space to sleep. Similarly, whether prior to, during, or after the experience of exploitation, the effects of trauma, mental health, and physical health and disability can all contribute to a higher risk of homelessness and housing instability and in turn an increased risk of further exploitation. Taken together, these findings point to the tremendous influence of housing in combatting sexual exploitation of children and the immense potential for housing assistance and stability to prevent exploitation. ***Ultimately, funding and resources for safe, supportive housing are needed to combat sexual exploitation of children and adults.***

³¹ “Homelessness is housing deprivation in its most severe form and is defined as “lacking a regular nighttime residence or having a primary nighttime residence that is a temporary shelter or other place not designed for sleeping.”

³² In the current study, housing instability encompasses a number of challenges, such as having trouble paying rent, overcrowding, moving frequently, staying with relatives, or spending the bulk of household income on housing.

³³ Fletcher (2020), [A systematic review of the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and substance use issues.](#)

Figure 18. Cycle of substance use, housing instability, and sexual exploitation.



Note on Homelessness and Human Trafficking

In 2021, UNANIMA International noted the following:

“In the past we have seen group activists and legislators fighting human trafficking, while others of us are working tirelessly to end homelessness. But the two are interlinked. What is important is identifying the problem, and in this case the problem is trafficked persons experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, and those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity being at risk for trafficking. Two intersecting issues, and the issues should not be examined separately. Rather the problem of human trafficking and its relationship to homelessness should be looked at as one.”³⁴

Financial instability and the ability to earn ‘quick and easy’ money appear to be a considerable pull factor.

Considering gender, age, and earnings, some notable differences are observed. Cisgender males are among the youngest and lowest earners in the sample. Conversely, trans/third gender respondents

³⁴ UNANIMA International (2021). [The Intersections of Family Homelessness and Human Trafficking](#).

are somewhat older than cis-males on average and transgender respondents are among the highest earners in the study with four indicating weekly earnings of greater than 10,000THB.³⁵ Regardless of gender, respondents reported making considerably more from the sex trade than they could from working a minimum wage job. However, this sample is not large enough to make broad generalizations and more research is needed to establish potential patterns and trends among these groups.

Most respondents (67%) indicate that they would stop trading sex if they were able to earn a stable income doing something else. However, respondents also noticed that leaving the sex trade is more than simply having sufficient income. For example, to fill the training and education needs and wants of this population, certified and/or government funded training programs would be beneficial to understand a) what young men and SOGIE-diverse youth are interested and/or invested in doing and b) what occupations are commensurate with the income of the majority of young men and trans/third gender people. One respondent (21-year-old, male), however, seems to see the sex trade as a kind of ‘insurance policy or back-up plan’ for times of financial crisis. He comments,

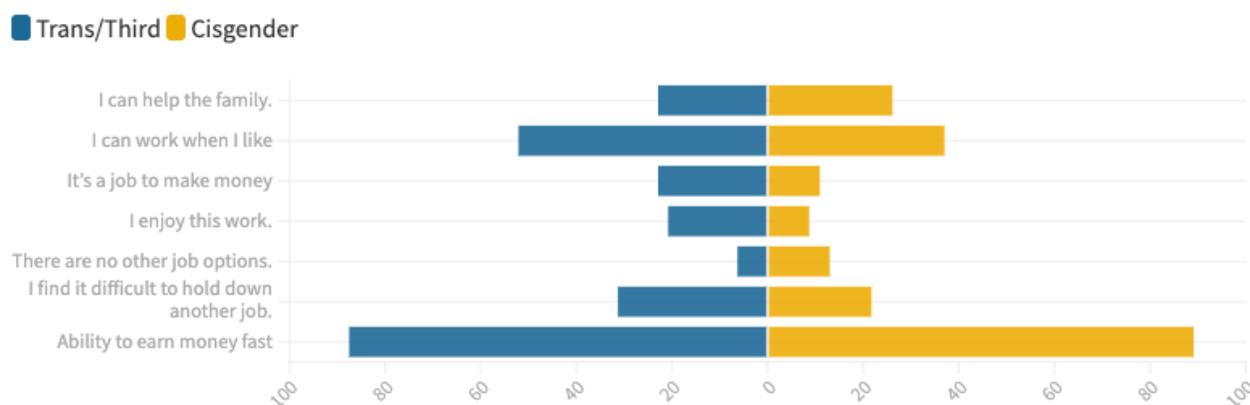
“I wouldn't stop... in case my finances crash again. Even if the finances are stable, I would do it because I can get money fast.”³⁶

Currently, many vocational training initiatives only provide education. When they do provide access to jobs, these jobs are often low wage and often do not consider the broader skills and experiences that young people may have. However, training institutions need to have training for staff in addressing prejudices toward people of different sexual orientations and gender identities. Broader non-discriminatory and comprehensive support services, including widely accessible education and employment training with opportunities would certainly alleviate some of the pressure for ‘fast’ money and bring more choice into the employment market for boys, young men, and trans/third gender people. Another helpful line of inquiry could be about longevity in the field. For instance, if a young person is new and getting money that they are not used to having, versus further down the road when they are more likely to have experienced violence and abuse. More research is needed to understand whether they consider sex work to be ‘fast’ or ‘easy’ once they have been doing it a while or if it is only at the early stages.

³⁵ 10,000THB (n=2), 20,000THB (n=1), and 40,000THB (n=1).

³⁶ Original Thai: “ไม่หยุด เพื่อการเงินมันจะล่มอีก ,ต่อให้การเงินมันคงก็จะไปเพราะได้เงินเร็ว”

Figure 19: Why do you trade sex as opposed to other sources of income?



As shown in Figure 19, the ability to earn money fast is highly recognized among both groups, followed by the ability to work when they like. Looking at job options or perceived job options between the groups, previous research (Davis & Miles, 2020; 2021) has found there to be a limited perception of the kinds of jobs that might be available to them as people who identify as trans or third gender.

The Impact of COVID-19

Contrary to the expectations of the research team, for the vast majority of respondents, **the COVID-19 pandemic had negative impacts on not only the income they could make through off-line (in-person) exchanges, but also negatively impacted income made from online exchanges.** The vast majority of young people in the current sample indicates considerable economic hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. One young person comments, “I lost about 50% of my customers³⁷ (R30) and others suggest that their customers disappeared entirely. Many also describe increased difficulty finding alternative sources of income, increasing the pressures on them to earn, while having fewer opportunities to do so.

While the number of customers and frequency clearly decreased, according to respondents, in person sex still seems to be have occurred at, albeit less frequently, during the pandemic. This was consistent with the Thai Government's findings,³⁸ including that the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent measures developed to handle it presented both opportunities and challenges to Thailand's continuing efforts in combatting human trafficking in 2020. Curfews and temporary closures of service businesses reduced possible opportunities for sex and labor trafficking – a greater number of migrant workers returned to their home countries awaiting the reopening of workplaces,

³⁷Original Thai: ลูกค้าน้อยลงประมาณ 50%”

³⁸Royal Thai Government (2021). [Country Report on Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts](#).

while border-control restrictions made it more difficult for transnational organized crime groups to commit human trafficking.

At the same time, there was a spike in online child sexual exploitations as children spent more time on the internet during school closures. This prompted law enforcement agencies, in particular Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children (TICAC), to intensify the efforts that led to one of the biggest online sting operations in Thailand.³⁹ More research is needed to determine if the return to tourism and internal movement will increase customers again.

Income Alternatives

The current results highlighted the role of Urban Light and other service providers in providing crucial opportunities for alternative incomes that are stable and sufficient. Many respondents reported having other jobs or alternative sources of income that use skills that can be built on when considering alternatives for those who wish to leave sex trade and/or escape sexual exploitation. Around two-thirds of respondents have additional sources of income outside of exchanging sex. Interesting finding that there is not one clear occupation. What sectors are involved? Need for more research into this in the future. These careers include:

- Construction, painting, plastering, welding, electrical work, etc.
- Performing arts (cabaret, etc.)
- Restaurant work, hotels, supermarkets
- Food delivery
- Retail, office work, online retailwork

UL can provide support to individuals who want to pursue these alternative careers and other lines of work.

Notable Differences Across Gender Identity⁴⁰

The research team are aware that the cohort is still a small sample and cannot be seen as representative of all non-female sex workers. However, the information provided can be useful as we move forward. It is important to notice particularly where there are large differences between cisgender males and transgender/third gender respondents. It should also be noted that these groups continue to be marginalized and left out of the picture in policy and program development. Very few resources are available outside of sexual health provision. Sex trafficking continues to be seen as a problem involving cisgender females with a small minority of men and people of other gender

³⁹ Ibid, 2021.

⁴⁰ Due to the iterative change in methodology the gender of respondents expanded from only males to those also those who identified as third gender and transgender.

identities. However, the resources to research the actual proportion of sex workers who are male and/or transgender/third gender are limited to small trusts. Those on the field recognize that it is a much larger problem than is perceived. Other research by Davis and Miles in SE Asia indicate a large number of street boys/young men are sexually exploited.

Across all 94 respondents, 46% (n =43) identified their gender as Male, 36% (n = 34) identified as third-gender, 15% (n =14) identified as a transgender-woman, and 3% (n =3) wrote in their gender identity as “Gay.” All respondents were also asked who they were attracted to and were given the option to check all the options that applied. Nearly all respondents (94%; n = 88) reported that they were attracted to straight men, nearly half 45% (n =42) to gay men, over a third 38% (n= 36) to women, and 18% (n = 17) to third gender people.

Almost a third of all respondents met the Palermo Protocol definition for sex trafficking victim (i.e. they reported beginning to trade sex online prior to the age of 18). This finding was true of just under half (45%) of cisgender male respondents and 18% of trans/third gender respondents in this research study. **However, it appears that cisgender male sex workers started trading sex earlier than their trans/third gender peers.** Specifically, trans/third gender respondents in the current study reported beginning in sex trade at the average age of 20. This, compared to the average age of entrance for cisgender males of 18 years old. Of note, 32% of all respondents (18% trans/third gender, 45% male) reported beginning to find customers online prior to the age of 18.

Although previous research we have conducted found that transgender people were at high risk of sexual violence there were few notable differences are observed between trans/third gender and cisgender males in the current study, with trans/third gender respondents being slightly less likely than males to indicate that they have been forced to have sex (65% to 70%, respectively)⁴¹.

⁴¹Findings shown here are child sexual exploitation (CSE). Children cannot sell sex as they are not able to consent. In cases where a child ‘appears’ to consent, or ‘initiates’ an exchange, they are still not able to consent.

Mental Health and Physical/Sexual Violence

Mental and emotional health are recognized as fundamental for recovery from trauma and human development, and an essential component of trauma-informed responses.

Previous literature has continuously noted the protective benefits associated with having a trustworthy relationship with someone while going through childhood⁴². Specifically, having trusted adult support in childhood has shown potential to increase resilience among children who may be exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as abuse, neglect, or other mistreatment. Practically, the current findings further solidify the need to promote trusting relationships between children and adults and fund community-level efforts to do so (e.g. drop-in centers, and mentorship programs). For example, the drop-in center currently provided by UL. This center, beyond providing necessities like food, also provides a space where young men can meet and build friendships with each other and supportive relationships with staff. Often in lieu of close familial relationships, the clients at UL know they have a place to go where people care about them and what happens to them. UL also provides opportunities, via phone or virtual means, to reconnect with family who may be elsewhere in the country.

This need for solid, and supportive emotional safety has been reaffirmed by the COVID-19 pandemic, where isolation and distance has caused significant emotional damage to children and teenagers. Young boys, men and trans/third gender people are no different in their essential need for emotional support. As such, any intervention, program, or center, as well as providing for basic needs, should prioritize emotional and mental needs of children and young people who have been trafficked. Practically, this can include funding available for counselors, social workers, outreach, and other person-centered positions focused on fulfilling the emotional needs of the clients.

Past and ongoing experiences of physical and sexual violence were frequently reported among participants.

Nearly two thirds of our respondents (65%) reported that they had been raped⁴³ at some point in their life with additional physical and emotional abuse reported by many others. Respondents further reported that they did not always know, or take measures to keep themselves safe when interacting with clients online or in person. Given these ongoing safety concerns, there remains a need for

⁴² Bellis, et al (2017). [Does continuous trusted adult support in childhood impart life-course resilience against adverse childhood experiences - a retrospective study on adult health-harming behaviors and mental well-being.](#)

⁴³ This question was intentionally worded to ensure accuracy. Specifically, given known hesitation to identify forced sex as rape, and the fact that participants may have different understandings of ‘rape’ and ‘sexual assault’ (e.g. it can only happen to women, there must be a violent struggle involved), the current survey question asked about being “forced to have sex.”

implementation of evidence-based interventions known to improve the safety of this population. Broadly, these interventions are most effective when imagined, developed, and implemented with young men, boys and trans/third gender people who are currently or previously were in the sex trade. They represent experts of their own experience and have the ability to provide the most practical and valuable support to their own safety.

The following are known safety measures that should be promoted when working with young men, boys, and trans/third gender people who engage in sex trade:

1. Understanding safe and less harmful sex offline - e.g. using condoms and lubricants
2. Informing someone (friend) if you are meeting someone in person and where you are.
Keeping phone and ID available and safe as much as possible
3. Understanding what consent is and what it is not and how to negotiate consent
4. Knowing what is sexual exploitation and when it is not exploitation
5. Knowing what is sexual violence and toxic masculinity and how to deal with it
6. Knowing which Apps appear to be more safe and which appear to be less safe
7. Knowing red flags. Knowing how to say “No!” and/or blocking contacts
8. Where to get help if you feel stalked or if you have been harmed. Knowing who are ‘safe’ police and health centers who do not discriminate.
9. Getting legal help if you feel you are being discriminated against

When looking at reporting of physical safety and instances of physical abuse/assault. There remained significant gender differences in the likelihood and actual reporting of incidents among our current population. With the exception of disclosure of personal information, cisgender males were less likely to report almost all incidences of abuse/assault compared to trans/third gender clients. Though the exact cause of this is beyond the scope of the current research it is likely that toxic masculinity and the gender norms and pressures associated with masculinity contribute significantly. For example, admitting that you did not defend yourself when violence occurred. Throughout Thailand and much of the globe there remains an assumption and expectation that men and boys are not ‘victims’ of physical attack and are capable of keeping themselves physically safe. Further, if they are a victim they are often seen as weak, or less of a man. Reporting a physical assault/abuse to an authority figure may, in their view, decrease their standing as a man and is therefore something that should be avoided. Intervention is needed to continue to combat this norm. Specifically, cisgender young men and boys would benefit from support focused on alternative and positive ways to express their masculinity or femininity and knowledge that masculinity does not mean suffering in silence.

Connecting to Support Services

Many respondents indicated considerable challenges in opening up to service providers.

While the highest percentage (47%) of respondents said they would prefer to connect with service providers face to face, many also noted preference for connecting through online means (25%) or starting with online connection with maybe face to face connection later (32%). This finding indicates a potential in-point for service providers to combat current challenges in implementing online options for outreach to connect people with services. Given the high level of online engagement among respondents, the findings of the current study also indicate the potential for online outlets to be used as effective advertisement and awareness building tools to let potential clients know what services are in their communities and that they are welcome. Given the stigma experienced and reported by respondents, online outreach and contact may also provide beneficial anonymity to clients. They can first anonymously understand what services are available and, after trust with service providers is gained, can reach out to service providers to connect in person.

However, more understanding is needed to determine the effectiveness and challenges of online marketing, contact, and outreach on making lasting relationships and contacts between clients and service providers. Previous literature has pointed to an openness among sex workers in other countries to anonymous and online service outlets⁴⁴ but more research would be needed to establish if this is true in Thailand and with boys, young men, and trans/third gender respondents.

The RSD method also revealed that these groups do not exist in separate bubbles. **The seeds were young men, but they recruited older respondents, which indicates that the networks in which they communicate openly about selling sex are intertwined.** Providing services based on a predetermined cutoff age (e.g. 18) effectively ignores the existence (and function) of these larger networks. To intervene with only those under a certain arbitrary age is likely to undermine the efficacy of interventions targeting both children and adults, due to the power balance of the adult child relationship. It is well recognized that to protect children you must work with whole families. Because not all youth have functional families, it should also be considered best practice to work with the adults who have influence over the lives of young people, and who commonly serve as ‘functional families’ for children and young adults.

Once the connection with potential clients has been established, findings reveal that there is a continued need to reduce and combat prejudice and stigma that exists in service provision.

Specifically, respondents in the current study continually reported that they felt that NGO staff don't really care about them (34%). In particular, two thirds of gay males (66%) indicated this belief, twice as frequent as trans/third gender and non-gay male respondents. Further, cisgender males were also least likely to have told an NGO about their work in sex trade. The majority of cisgender males and trans/third gender respondents indicate feeling that NGO staff were judgmental toward them.

⁴⁴ Sanders, (2004). [A continuum of risk? The management of health, physical and emotional risks by female sex workers.](#)

Relatedly, a majority of respondents noted that they had never told a service provider about trading sex (65%). When asked if they were going to tell an NGO provider about their life experiences, who they would feel comfortable talking to (and told to check all that apply), 46% of respondents indicated that gender did not matter to who they would feel comfortable with. However, 35% noted that they would feel comfortable talking to a woman as compared to 21% and 11% of respondents who would feel comfortable talking to a man or transgender person respectively. Together, these findings point to a continued need for training and education for professionals working in service settings to work with this community. Training and implementation of supportive, non-judgmental practices can aid in every step of service provision.

Finally, beyond supportive connection with potential clients, effective and ongoing services need to be available for all who choose to engage with service providers. Apart from sexual health, very little support exists for transgender people regarding help with trauma recovery, and alternative employment. Also, although there are some services available for street children, once children reach the age of majority, many of those services cease but many are still vulnerable and need protection and care. **At large, the anti-trafficking community needs to be aware of the unique needs of transgender and third gender people as well as adults who have been sexually exploited as children.** There remains a need to a) increase the awareness of existing services for these populations and b) assess and implement health, legal, and social services that are still lacking.

Conclusions and Future Directions

The current research project used a respondent-driven sampling method to understand the current landscape of online and in-person sexual exploitation of boys, young men, and trans/third gender people in Northern Thailand. A vast majority of respondents reported using both online and in-person means to meet customers and trade sex and/or as an avenue for sexual exploitation. Respondents overwhelmingly reported feelings of stigma, shame, and discrimination for their experiences and hesitation in reporting to authorities or talking to service providers about their experiences. It was also clear that housing instability and homelessness were major contributors to the cycle of sexual exploitation.

Further, though the original study targeted youth, findings showed a great need among adults who were sexually exploited as a child. There remains a significant lack of resources and funding delegated to a) housing and b) services for adults once they age out of historically child-centered service systems and models. As the landscape of online sexual exploitation changes and grows rapidly, the response by service providers, funders, and government entities needs to similarly respond rapidly, and take into account the voices and needs of those they aim to serve. This includes the provision of comprehensive survival services including housing as well as the continued survival, financial, and

legal assistance to adult survivors of abuse and exploitation as they age out of child services but retain much of the physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of abuse during childhood years.

Finally, to keep up with the growth of online sexual exploitation, the development and funding for outreach in online forums and spaces to potential clients of Urban Light and related services is crucial to reach all potential victims of sexual exploitation that may have otherwise been missed in in-person services.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, the research team has the following recommendations:

Society/General

- **Support boys and young men who experience abuse and exploitation.** Taboo, shame, and the expectations of masculinity inhibit particularly cisgender boys and men from reporting when they experience abuse, rape, or exploitation. Therefore, the scale of CSEC against boys is likely vastly underreported. Openly supporting and encouraging young boys and men to seek support when they experience abuse can decrease stigma and prevent future abuse and exploitation.
- **Support SOGIE children and young people who experience abuse and exploitation.** Similarly, to their cisgender counterparts, this study revealed that trans and third gender children and young people are also subject to taboo, shame, and misconceptions that portray them as sexually promiscuous. They may be blamed by society due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, and, perhaps even worse, this blame can be internalized. We should acknowledge that all children and young people deserve protection from abuse and exploitation regardless of their gender, whilst also acknowledging that gender is an important factor to consider, and that support should be gender-sensitive.
- **Broaden the definition of abuse and exploitation to include those that occur in online spaces.** A quarter of all respondents reported that their videos/photos of them had been circulated online without their permission. Though not often recognized as such, this constitutes a newer and growing form of abuse and exploitation. In addition to a societal recognition of these forms of abuse, support and awareness of legal options for those wishing to prosecute and pursue justice for these crimes is needed.
- **Train professionals from all sectors to the unique needs of young cisgender men and trans/third gender people.** Results reveal a continued stigma amongst respondents regarding disclosure of their experiences and hurt from professionals in multiple sectors (health, legal, education, social services). Additional training for professionals can assist in both the identification of non-cisgender female trafficking survivors as well as increase confidence and usage of support systems for these survivors.
- **Ensure sufficient community support during and immediately after the pandemic.** Respondents reported a consistent and significant decrease or complete elimination of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Local resources and investment is needed to ensure that this newfound lack of income does not put young men at risk of exploitation and trafficking. This can come in the form of government stimulus, access to food and survival needs, and connections to employment to meet basic income needs. After the pandemic,

education is required to ensure at-risk boys, young men and SOGIE children and youth do not take unnecessary risks to make up for lost income.

- **Emphasize and educate young people on boundaries related to their own safety and health.** As noted by the current study's respondents, the COVID-19 pandemic poses a new and unique risk to health and safety for young people in the sex trade. Education on safe sex, safe ways in which to assert boundaries, and increasing self-worth can help combat these risks. This education should be open, honest, and non-judgmental.
- **Implement early intervention for boys, young men, and trans/third gender children with known vulnerability factors (e.g. homelessness, poverty, trauma).** Several respondents noted hearing about sex trade from a friend who was under the age of 18. Early intervention is critical to prevent children from unknowingly participating in their own exploitation or that of others. Early intervention should be gender-sensitive, and should specifically encourage open dialogue about a) the different risks that boys and young men, and SOGIE children and youth experience, b) the ways that their gender identity may have an impact on how they come to be abused or exploited, and c) the emphasis that regardless of gender, all children and youth can be victims of these crimes, and are equally as deserving of prevention and protection from them.
- **Harness the potential benefits of peer-to-peer outreach.** The current study reflects a preference for word-of-mouth communication. This supports the known benefits of peer outreach in making use of existing client networks to distribute information and support regarding available services.
- **Challenge toxic masculinity and adopt ways of affirming self-identity.** The results of the current study further solidify the need to encourage positive self-identity and healthy communication outside of the expectations of masculinity. This includes promoting representation of different ways of "being a man" that challenge those elements (e.g. men cannot be victims of violence, men have to be tough) recognized as contributing to low self-esteem and a lack of help-seeking when needed.

For Service Providers working on Child Rights, Sexual Health, and Providing Shelter

- **Online Sexual Exploitation of Children**
 - **Implement regular NGO staff education, and find young experts** to create opportunities to keep up to date on the changing landscape of OCSEC (e.g. apps, websites, opportunities for online outreach). Respondents in this study indicated their belief that the best ways to prevent abuse and exploitation, and to protect those who have survived it, is to talk openly and share their real-life experiences. Similarly, in identifying where online abuse and sexual exploitation might be taking place, organizations should look to children and young people for the answers. Service

providers must be careful to create safe, trauma-informed spaces and methods to seek information from the children and young people with whom they are already working, and trust them as ‘experts of their own experiences’ when trying to keep up with the rapidly changing online spaces in which children and young people interact.

- **Prioritize awareness and education for clients on keeping themselves safe online.** Education should include information regarding the unique risks of online sex trade (e.g. disclosure of personal information, publication of explicit photos and/or videos) and how to protect oneself against extortion of private information and photos.
 - **Expand outreach to include online spaces** frequented by victims of exploitation and where traffickers may be grooming children for exploitation. This can include regular connection on the site, advertising services on sites, and/or providing regular virtual assistance and support.
 - **Increase outreach to families and caregivers** specifically aimed at increasing knowledge of the risks of certain online activity and how to keep their child safe online.
 - **Do not assume the online means less risk.** As the online sex industry can often exclude physical contact, it is sometimes assumed that this equates to less risk. Online sex trade comes with unique risks that have the potential to be just as harmful, including the spread of child pornography, and the extortion of children and adults based on ‘private’ sexual content. This study also found that 91% of respondents were engaging in exchanging sex both online and off line. Several (26 people) respondents also reported that they first came to know about the sex trade through online dating apps or websites, indicating that they may have been subjected to online grooming and later agreed to /decided to engage in trading sex in person.
- **Support and Education for victims and potential victims of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation**
 - **Increase knowledge of reporting channels and available support systems.** Advertise anonymous channels for reporting cases of sexual abuse, online sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and other forms of sexual exploitation, and increase awareness around the compensation available to crime victims including sex trafficking victims.
 - This includes increasing awareness of NGOs as outlets for support should someone experience a negative experience. In the current study only 7% of respondents reported telling an NGO about their experience and the most common outlet was the police. Though this is to be expected with the ease of use of the emergency number, increased awareness of NGO support can assist law enforcement in ensuring that survivors receive the support necessary support in emotionally and legally moving forward with their case.

- **Adopt trauma informed care.** Respondents reported multiple obstacles that make them less likely to share information with service providers including taboo against talking about sex, shame and stigma, and fear of being judged. Service providers can combat these challenges by adopting a trauma-informed approach to treatment as well as collecting and implementing ongoing feedback from clients and the community.
- **Continue education and awareness around issues of consent and what constitutes rape and sexual abuse.** The current findings revealed misperceptions regarding rape, sexual abuse and trafficking (e.g., ‘I didn’t stop them so it was my fault’, ‘I agreed to one transaction so other sex acts committed against my wishes were not rape/trafficking’). Several respondents (65%people) reported circumstances and events that would legally classify them as a victim, but as long as they do not understand that these experiences that they have survived were crimes, they will be unable to come forward and report, and seek the support they need and deserve.
- **Implement sustainable practices that include survivor voices and participation in education and services.** Recommended by several respondents is utilizing the known benefits of an approach to education and services that is informed by survivor voices and intentionally includes participation of survivors in program planning and implementation.
- **Other Recommendations**
 - **Capitalize on incomes outside of the sex industry.** The majority of respondents in the current study reported having incomes outside of the sex industry and many reported being in the sex industry due to difficulty obtaining or holding another job. This provides a unique opportunity to counter the lucrateness of the sex industry and provide comprehensive training to expand employment options.
 - **Involve families in addressing sexual exploitation, trafficking, or involvement in the sex industry.** Current findings indicated that as many as 40% of respondents live with family members, but that as many as two-thirds do not tell the people they live with about their involvement in exchanging sex. Involving families and caregivers is an avenue that could be explored through outreach and campaign work in future years. (I.e., families may believe that this is a problem that affects other people’s children, but in reality, it might be much closer to home).
- **Be proactive in evaluating, acknowledging, and challenging gender bias in service delivery.**
 - As the majority of sexual abuse and sex trafficking crimes are committed against children and women, the majority of protection and prevention services are also aimed at engaging this target group. However, sexual abuse and exploitation is

committed against children and young people of all genders. The numbers of reported crimes against boys and young men have steadily been increasing⁴⁵ ⁴⁶, and these services should be made available equally.

- Many organizations may be more familiar and comfortable working with girls and women, and may wish to expand their services to include boys, young men, and SOGIE children and youth. Once gender bias has been identified, service providers could act to provide more equitable services by reaching out through the existing networks they already have (i.e., if you are working with vulnerable and marginalized girls, ask them about their brothers, cousins, schoolmates, and SOGIE relatives).
- NGOs may also find success in engaging these groups through relationship building, starting with finding out more about their interests, and creating engaging activities that will appeal to them. This might also include hiring staff of a different gender. Cisgender (male) respondents, in particular, showed greater preference for gender of support worker, with nearly half (45%, n=30) saying that they would prefer to work with someone who was also male.
- **Do not overlook adults.**
 - The childhood abuse, exploitation, and trauma does not cease when one turns 18. Vulnerable young adults deserve help and assistance just as children do. Additionally, adults who have survived victimization and exploitation have the unique knowledge, connections, and experience to assist in the fight against exploitation among both children and adults.
 - When respondents were asked how they first found out about trading sex, the most frequently indicated way was through a friend over the age of 18. While many organizations are already working to with families to protect children, it is important to analyze the local context, discover which groups (beyond family and peers of the same age) have an influence on vulnerable young people, and to cast a wider net, providing training and services among friendship groups, even if those friendship groups do not fall in the more common ‘target groups’ of people under the age of 18 or 24.
 - As this report revealed, many boys, young men, and transgender/third gender children and youth reach adulthood without fully understanding that they are or have been victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. Many people who would count under local legal definitions as victims of sexual exploitation or sex trafficking⁴⁶ may not come

⁴⁵ International Labor Office (2017), [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery](#).

⁴⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020), [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020 Country Profile: East Asia and the Pacific](#).

forward until much later in life, if at all⁴⁷. Not only do these adult survivors deserve to receive the care and protection that was not afforded to them as children, but they can also be instrumental in taking on leadership roles. In the context of this study, some solutions might involve working together with adults experiencing homelessness, and adults already engaging with sexual health services (particularly services aimed at LGBT individuals or Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)).

- Acknowledging that groups of children and young people do interact with adults, especially when experiencing homelessness in ‘found families’, or in the LGBT community where ‘chosen families’ are much more common, the research points to a need to cooperate with these groups, to harness their potential to influence younger members of their communities. In providing services and education to adult survivors, they may be able to use their increased understanding of the realities and laws about child rights, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking, to fight not only for their own rights, but also to advocate for the next generation, and even potentially to act as watchdogs in these communities to prevent similar crimes, report cases, or provide word-of-mouth signposting to trusted NGOs and Government organizations.
- When engaging adults, service providers should be aware of safeguarding risks. Also, important, as illustrated by the 46% of respondents (N=44) who reported finding out about the exchanging sex through a friend over the age of 18, is acknowledging that excluding adult survivors altogether may also cause safeguarding concerns, as without intervention, these adult survivors may (perhaps inadvertently) perpetuate ideas or behaviors that normalize sexual abuse and exploitation.
- **Early Intervention is also important**
 - Notably, 13% (n = 6) of Cisgender Male respondents noted finding out about trading sex from a friend who was under the age of 18. This indicated a need to have frank and honest discussions about sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and related topics (bodily autonomy, consent) with teenagers, and even to broach these topics in an age-appropriate manner with younger children (for instance, in teaching the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touching / ‘Good Touch Bad Touch’)
- **Open, honest, and non-judgmental discussions about sex and the exchanging sex are important, and partnerships may help to provide holistic services**
 - In this survey, the taboo surrounding sex and sexuality was the biggest challenge to opening up to service providers (57%, n = 54). As long as sex remains taboo, predators

⁴⁷ Cole, J. (2018) [Service Providers’ Perspectives on Sex Trafficking of Male Minors: Comparing Background and Trafficking Situations of Male and Female Victims.](#)

will use this to their advantage, to shame children and young people into not coming forward by using shame to manipulate the people they abuse.

- Respondents in this study noted that open and honest discussions about sex and sex work are vital to prevent and protect children and young people from the dangers of exchanging sex.
- Sexual Health organizations across Thailand are already tackling these challenges, and many are uniquely placed and trained to talk about safe sex in child-friendly, age-appropriate way. These organizations may also be safe spaces for people of various sexual orientations and gender identity expressions (SOGIE), but they may lack the resources to provide protection and prevention services to survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation. Vulnerable individuals may seek sex health services alone, when they may benefit from a more holistic approach (including support with housing, education, employment, legal assistance, etc.)
- Organizations providing shelter and alternative housing solutions should also be aware of the intersections between homelessness/housing instability, and human trafficking/sexual exploitation. Similarly, while these organizations may focus on providing basic needs for survival, and individuals and families may approach them to seek housing services alone, these individuals may also benefit from interventions designed to help them come to terms with and recover from the Trauma caused by sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Partnerships between organizations working with vulnerable populations (i.e., those seeking assistance for sexual health or housing solutions), and anti-trafficking organizations could be leveraged to provide training for staff and volunteers on the signs of human trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation. In addition, fostering relationships between organizations working on separate but interlinked issues can also help to ensure that survivors of sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking receive more holistic care, from partner organizations who have the resources to provide protection services.
- **Service providers need ongoing outlets to listen to and implement programming that responds to the needs and wants of all victims and survivors of exploitation.** Survivors and their voices should genuinely inform the need, development, and implementation of services for them.

For Funders

- **Make funds available for comprehensive training, awareness, and support of alternative employment.** When asked about what should be done to help people transition out of the sex industry, respondents most frequently reported the availability of other income sources,

something that was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Comprehensive training on how to apply, obtain, and maintain employment in other industries would assist greatly in 1) allowing those who wish to leave the sex industry an avenue for alternative employment and 2) providing others who may consider leaving a representation of the alternative options available to them for the future.

- **Prioritize multi-year funding to support long-term commitments for housing and education.**

When asked what would help most in preventing future exploitation, respondents repeatedly reported the need for employment opportunities, housing, and education. The study also revealed over a third of respondents had not finished high school (34% n=32), and that this number increased to over fifty-percent among cis-gendered males (57% n=26). In order to secure safe and decent work, organizations need funding to support enrollment in formal education and non-formal education, and to provide housing for survivors as they work to pursue their educational goals. Providing these services, as well as the necessary health care support, counseling, transportation, food, legal services, etc. to support a survivor to become fully self-sufficient can sometimes take several years. Seeking funding on a year-by-year basis creates challenges for service providers, especially smaller and grass-roots organizations, who may struggle to be able to make these commitments if they are not able to accurately forecast the financial security of their programs for the next few years ahead.

- **Make funding available for staff costs.**

Providing adequate protection services requires building and fostering relationships with trustworthy adults. Ensuring that these services are provided by trained professionals with the knowledge, experience, and skills necessary to manage these with a trauma-informed and survivor centered approach. These costs can and should be considered as programmatic costs, since the human interaction involved in protecting survivors is paramount to the success of the programs, as was echoed by the respondents in this study.

- **Make flexible funding available.**

Flexible or unrestricted funding allows service providers to efficiently respond to rapidly changing circumstances such as pandemics or technological advancements. In addition, flexible funding can be allocated to create trauma informed, survivor-led initiatives. Doing so would demonstrate trust that with appropriate, trauma-informed support, survivors can be trusted as experts of their own experiences and can be empowered to fully participate in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating their own projects, which may be a powerful tool for some survivors. This can help survivors build confidence and self-esteem as their opinions are taken seriously, and may be healing for some survivors as they realize that their decision making and their contributions can make a difference in fighting sexual exploitation and abuse – something they may have felt powerless against in the past.

- **Make funds available to provide technical assistance and support to enable NGOs to keep up with online trends and provide outreach to potential victims online.**

Additional investment in online spaces is needed as an effort to keep up with emerging technology trends and spaces used to facilitate exploitation and abuse of children. As many NGOs do not have on staff an expert in technology, nor the hardware and software required to make significant change. These resources could prove invaluable in building the infrastructure and knowledgebase to combat exploitation online. NGOs require additional funding to bring on specialists in graphic design, web-design, and social media, in order to reach out to vulnerable children and young people, in online spaces, who might not otherwise have knowledge of the services available, and who might not be reachable through in-person outreach.

- **Make available funds for large scale, targeted online ad campaigns.** Given the noted use of dating apps and other online sites in recruiting respondents into the sex industry, NGOs and service providers need significant funding for the construction of advertising and marketing campaigns to counter these messages. These campaigns will require significant funding to ensure adequate reach and adaptability to new sites and spaces online.
- **Invest in Survivors.** This report confirms willingness from survivors to invest in their own futures and the futures of their peers by making suggestions that can improve lives. Survivors have the right to participate (Article 12 in the UNCRC) and in current literature on co-production. Survivors should be compensated for their time and emotional labor. this is considered best practice⁴⁸, with the United States Department of State recommending “Unifying Trauma-informed practices and voices of Survivor Leadership” in the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report.

For Government and Policy Makers

- **Online Sexual Exploitation of Children**
 - **Expand protection, prosecution, and identification efforts to include online sources.** Ensure that funding and resources are also in place to combat abuse and exploitation happening in online spaces. This includes providing funding and support for NGOs with the capacity and connections to initiate and sustain online outreach programs to reach vulnerable youth and adults in online spaces.
 - **Explore the benefit of investigating online payments** in the process of identifying, prosecuting, and convicting offenders in sex trafficking cases.
- **Human Trafficking Reporting and Policy**

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State (2021) [Trafficking in Persons Report 2021](#).

- The evidence gathered in this report echoes the suggestions in the US TIP Report⁴⁹ to adopt a definition for human trafficking and human trafficking victim consistent with the Palermo Protocol, specifically, by counting victims/survivors even if they do not wish to prosecute. Not only would this enable more survivors of human trafficking to receive support services, but adhering to these internationally accepted standards for counting survivors would create the possibility for additional victim identification, and contribute towards higher rankings in annual TIP Report by the US Department of State.
- **Continue to develop standards and procedures to ensure that Government services are Trauma informed and victim centered, and support family-based care**
 - “institutional care can be considered both a cause and an outcome of human trafficking.” LUMOS (2013). In this study alone, 10% of respondents reported growing up in shelters. Though it is unclear whether these shelters were government owned or privately run institutions, there is much evidence that growing up in institutions (as opposed to growing up with families, or in foster care) can, counterintuitively, be a precursor to human trafficking.⁵⁰
- **Remove statute of limitations on legal prosecution of sexual exploitation and violence**
 - Currently, the statute of limitations on the sexual exploitation of children (SEC) in Thailand is 15 years⁵¹.
 - Consistent with previous research, the current study found that male survivors of violence and exploitation tend to come forward later in life, if at all ^{52,53}. Even if these older cases cannot be prosecuted years later, the testimonies or evidence provided by survivors who later wish to come forward could contribute to a wider body of evidence and may add weight to other legal cases, assisting prosecutors to convict offenders of sex trafficking, sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation in any form.
 - It is therefore recommended that the statute of limitations on legal prosecution of sexual exploitation and violence be removed.
- **Update law to address online grooming**
 - Currently there is no provision that addresses online grooming in Thai law, meaning that the crime of exploitation must have already taken place for it to be prosecuted.

⁴⁹ U.S. Department of State (2021) [Trafficking in Persons Report 2021](#).

⁵⁰ LUMOS (2013) [Cycles of Exploitation: links between childrens institutions and human trafficking](#).

⁵¹ Criminal Code B.E 2499 (1956), Section 95.

⁵² Paasche et al., (2018) [Vulnerable Here or There? Examining the vulnerability of victims of human trafficking before and after return](#).

⁵³ Cole (2018) [Service providers' perspectives on sex trafficking of male minors: Comparing background and trafficking situations of male and female victims](#).

To avoid potential harm and exploitation before it happens, it is recommended that Thai law be updated to include the potential for prosecution of grooming.

- **Consider utilizing the trained experts in the private sector (NGOs) to conduct victim identification screening**

- The study revealed the majority of respondents were most likely to report dangerous situations such as abuse or leaked images on the internet to police. While this is a positive reflection on the services provided by the police, it is also important to note that throughout the study, there were several instances in which respondents indicated a lack of understanding of the meaning of sexual exploitation and abuse, and that they were often unlikely to identify themselves as victims/survivors of rape and sexual assault, despite later answering that they had experienced forms of violence which would be typically be classified this way. For this reason, survivors may not report to the police, as they may not understand that they qualify as victims under the law. In addition, this study is only a snapshot into the experiences of boys, young men, and transgender/third gender people in Northern Thailand. More research is required to understand the full extent of these issues as they affect people of different genders in Thailand.
- Given that governmental organizations may have to operate with limited budgets and high caseloads, one possible solution would be to provide specific training and accreditation to NGO staff (for example, licensed social workers, psychologists, etc.), to train them on victim identification. This could help to reduce the workload of governmental organizations, and by harnessing the potential trust that already exists by these private sector professionals and their local communities, this might increase the availability of data on detected survivors, as well as promoting partnership and encouraging NGOs to share reliable data with Government partners.

- **Promote anonymous, trauma-informed and incentivized reporting mechanisms, and advertise these services online**

- A significant proportion of respondents stated that they would report instances of crime and abuse against them to the police. They stated they would be more likely to report these crimes if they could do so anonymously, had legal support, and if there was compensation available.
- Continue to invest in online outreach to reach children who may be vulnerable online. The work already being conducted by the Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children Taskforce (TICAC) is an excellent example of online outreach. NGOs including The Hug Project, FOCUS and Child Line are also excellent examples of organizations raising awareness online, and providing online assistance, as well as interactive and

child-friendly tools to help children who may be experiencing sexual abuse, online exploitation, or trafficking, or other child rights abuses.

- **Expand partnerships with private (NGO/CSO) organization**
 - Continue to promote trauma informed initiatives, and cooperation in multi-disciplinary teams by leveraging partnerships between anti-trafficking and child protection NGOs, but also by expanding to engage with other civil society organizations, especially those at the grassroots level, or those engaging with vulnerable populations. These might include:
 - Sexual health organizations (especially those focused on LGBT/SOGIE and communities of men who have sex with men)
 - NGOs working in Child Protection and Prevention, and Human Trafficking
 - NGOs operating Shelters for Child Protection
 - NGOs operating Shelters for adults experiencing homelessness
 - Local government and community groups (such as children's councils, village leaders, women's leaders), etc.

Please Note: While this study focused on Northern Thailand - and most respondents were based in Chiang Mai - it is likely that boys, young men, and transgender/third-gender children and youth are even less likely to know about or have access to appropriate support services. Utilizing the support and existing connections of these community based organizations across the country will create greater understanding among these populations, and could have a larger scale not only in cities, but in rural communities, where awareness of the issues of sexual abuse and exploitation among these populations might otherwise be lacking.

For Researchers

- **Conduct similar co-productive research involving survivors.** This research could be expanded elsewhere in Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries, or elsewhere in the world. If conducted elsewhere in Thailand, it would be of note to see what kind of differences exist between rural vs urban areas. Cultural and religious differences in different regions/countries might also produce quite different findings
 - The research tool/survey created for this report can be shared with other researchers and NGOs who would like to use it to compare findings across geographical locations (contact jarrett@jarrettdavis.org for more information).
- **Include children and young people in the development and direction of the policies and programs that impact them.** This is recommended by Article 12 in the UNCRC but also in the current debate around co-production even of vulnerable people. This is reflected in the findings as well - respondents said that to help people who are being exploited/those who

want to get out of the sex trade you should simply tell them about the whole range of experiences of those who have been there in the past.

- **Adopt an inclusive conceptualization of the sex industry** to include both in-person and online sexual activity. As these two mediums are intricately connected, a holistic approach to conceptualization of commercial sex more accurately captures reality.
- **Focus on what incentivizes exchange sex.** Future research would benefit from the examination of the potential income gained from exchanging sex compared to other occupations. The current results overwhelmingly note that respondents were making more money from exchanging sex than they would if they had a minimum wage job. However, it would be valuable to explore whether this disparity also applies to other employment that boys and young men could hold. In this way, service providers may also focus on these occupations as an appealing way to see another option outside of sex trade.
- **Prioritize child safety and confidentiality** in project planning, data collection, and results dissemination. It is recommended that this be accomplished through intentional and ongoing conversations with the project team regarding child safety as well as the inclusion of an external review of the study protocol and procedures focused on maintaining safety of children and all respondents.
- **Equitable partnerships with local communities, organizations, and leaders is critical.** The lack of these partnerships has the potential to cause significant harm as ill-informed researchers may misinterpret study findings and/or unintentionally put respondents at risk.
- **Provide transparent details on study design, recruitment, sampling, and analysis.** Following this recommendation allows readers and stakeholders to properly put into context the study's findings and their implications for change.
- **Focus on multi-method dissemination of results and findings.** Broaden the scope of dissemination to include not only academic audiences and funders, but also community leaders, policy makers, and organizations

Annex 1: Informed Consent

Respondent ID#: _____

Online Informed Consent Agreement

Overview

Thank you for your interest in helping out with our research. This research is called “The Online/Offline Male Empowerment Project”. It is conducted by the Urban Light Foundation, which is a service provider for boys and young men in the Chiang Mai area. This survey will ask basic questions about your work and experiences trading sex in Thailand, so that we can develop better services and programs to meet the needs and interests of young people like you.

You are eligible to participate if you:

- Were assigned “male” at birth
- Aged 15-24 years
- Are presently trading sex, or have traded sex in exchange for something of value within the past 12 months.
- Are presently living or working within the greater Chiang Mai area in Northern Thailand.
- Are willing and able to understand and provide consent to be involved in research.
- Are willing and able to successfully identify and recruit at least five (5) other eligible participants from their social networks to participate in the research

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your participation in the survey will be kept secret. We will assign your survey a unique identification number, which will be used in place of your name so that the researchers can't see who you are. No names or contact information will ever be included in the survey data. And all the data will be kept securely and protected with password on an encrypted server. Only the research team will be able to access it and when we are done analyzing the data, all the original information will be deleted after 12 months.

Right to Withdraw

Some of the questions might be sensitive or personal and affect how you feel. You always have the right to withdraw from the research project at any time you wish—even after submitting your information. Let us know if you would like support from us for any feelings or concerns from this research. You can also contact the lead researcher at any time, through the details below.

Compensation

After you successfully complete the survey, you will be provided with an online cash card for a major grocery-retail chain valued at 300 THB. This card will be provided by a link sent to the social media account used to complete this form. Some respondents may be asked to refer to other young people to complete the survey. These respondents will receive an additional online cash card for each successful referral, valued at 200 THB, which will also be sent via link.

Approval

This research project has been granted ethical approval by an Independent Ethical Review Board at The Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University.

Contact/Support

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research, or would like to request support, you can directly contact the lead researcher below:

- **Name:** Jarrett Davis
- **Phone:** 1 (740) 304 - 5040
- **Email:** jarrett@jarrettdavis.org

Or, you can reach out to the Urban Light fieldwork team leader:

- **Name:** P·Paan
- **Phone:** (+66) 0943296942
- **Email:** outreach@urban-light.org

Annex 2: Previous Research by the Research Team

Boys for Baht? (2014)

Structured interviews were conducted with 51 males in the entertainment industry from three main areas within Chiang Mai, which are known to be key to the industry. The sampling included two main groups of males in the entertainment industry: male masseurs (51% of sampling) and bar-based respondents (49% of sampling). Respondents within the bar-based category are broken down into three subgroups: those working in KTV bars (n=10), those working within show bars (n=7), and those working freelance within bars who are not directly employed by the bar (n=8).

First Sexual Experience: Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their first sexual experiences. These first experiences are understood to denote sexual intercourse (either with a male or a female), and may exclude some forms of unwanted sexual touching which may have happened prior to what respondents have labeled as their "first sexual experience". Ages at which these first sexual experiences took place range 13 years, the youngest being nine and the oldest being 22 years of age. Respondents indicated that their first sexual partners were more than 2.5 years older than them, on average, at the time of their first sexual experience; the youngest first sexual partner was said to have been nine years of age (the respondent was the same age at the time) and the oldest first partner was reported to have been 41 years of age (the respondent was 17 at the time). Among these experiences, 21% of cases qualify as adult-to-child sexual abuse. There were two cases in which respondents stated that their first sexual experience was forced. The perpetrators in both cases were adult females (31 and 19 years of age) and the respondents reported being 16 and 15 years of age, respectively, at the time of the experience. Among all respondents, slightly more than one in four, or 26%, indicate that their first partner was a male and 72% indicate that the first partner was female.

No Other Choice (2017)

In Urban Light's 2014 study of 51 males in the sex industry in Chiang Mai⁵⁴ 'No Other Choice', there was some evidence that 'underage sex workers' (victims of child sex trafficking) were available to customers of the entertainment industry in Chiang Mai. Three respondents in the study admitted to being under the age of 18, one reporting to be 15 years of age, and two reporting to be 17 years of age. More than 80% of all respondents fell within the UNICEF definition of youth (15-24 years of age). More than one in five, or 21% of respondents reported entering into sex work before the age of 18. Nearly all respondents were found to be members of various ethnic minority groups from Thailand and nearby Burma. All but five respondents, or 90% of those interviewed, indicated beginning sex work within, or before, the UNICEF definition of youth, which is defined as 15 to 24 years of age. Over half (52%) of clients were perceived to be foreign which means that nearly half (48%) were locals which dispels the myth that nearly all clients were foreigners.

In the 2017 study, the number of clients that respondents reportedly met for sex within the past week ranged from 0 to 8. Respondents with the highest rates of meeting clients for sex within the past week were from show bars, meeting an average of 2.75 clients within the past week. This was followed by respondents from male massage establishments who indicated meeting 2.65 clients on average within the past week. More than 15% of respondents indicated meeting five or more clients for sex within the past week. Twenty-nine percent of respondents, or 13 people, indicated that they had been filmed for pornography. Being filmed for pornographic films was most commonly reported among respondents coming from show bars, where 83% of respondents stated that they had been videoed for such films.

They Forced Me to Work (TBC)

"They forced me to work"⁵⁵ is another research project supported by Urban Light that focused on street-involved children in Chiang Mai. Fifty-three interviews were conducted with children and young people (28 males and 25 females) who lived or worked on the streets. Interviews were conducted with 28 boys, 25 girls, and two transgender youth. Slightly more than one-third of respondents (20 or 37%) identified as ethnic Thais. The majority (61%) identified as ethnic minority groups including Lahu, Akha, Mu Sue, Tai Yai, and Lisu, and one (2%) identified as Burmese. Among

⁵⁴Davis, Jarrett D.; Glotfelty, Elliot; and Miles, Glenn (2017) "'No Other Choice': A Baseline Study on the Vulnerabilities of Males in the Sex Trade in Chiang Mai, Thailand," *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*: Vol. 2: Iss. 4, Article 10. DOI: 10.23860/dignity.2017.02.04.10. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol2/iss4/10>

⁵⁵ Pending publication (July 2022)

school-aged respondents, 17 children (48.6%) cite they are currently enrolled in school, and 18 (51.4%) cite that they are not. Among those out of school, six are boys and 14 are girls.

The ages of street-involved children range from 11 to 24 years of age. Among them are 28 males (51%), 25 females (45%), and two identifying as “ladyboys” or transgender (4%). All respondents in this study fall within or below the UN definition of youth (ages 15-24), with most respondents (35 or 63%) falling below the age of 18, among whom, 18 are female and 17 are male.

The most common form of violence witnessed both across all genders (Figure 3a) comes from peers, with nearly half (47% or 25 participants) stating that they had witnessed peer violence, including 11 boys, 12 girls, and both transgender respondents. Witnessing parental violence is described by 26% of respondents (14), within this group are seven males (26%), five girls (20%), and both transgender respondents (100%).

Living on the street is an additional risk factor and increases vulnerability to violence: seven out of the nine street-living boys stated they had witnessed violence, mainly beatings, from other youth. Forty-three percent (23 or 43%) of all respondents acknowledged adults asking them to do things that they did not like. This included 12 males (43%), nine females (38%), and both transgender respondents (100%). Participants described a range of acts, such as being forced to use drugs, being anally raped, being bribed to have sex without a condom, and being forced to work without pay. Forty-four percent (24 or 44%) of respondents disclosed experiences of inappropriate sexual touching by at least one adult offender at some point in their lives. Males in the sampling were nearly twice as likely to disclose being sexually touched with 54% of boys (15) and 29% of girls (seven) describing one or multiple instances. Both transgender respondents cite sexual touching by adult offenders. The average age at which the sexual touching first occurred was 15 years of age, the youngest being age seven. Twenty-two respondents (46%) describe instances in which they were provided food, money, or a gift in exchange for sex. Among these are 15 boys, five girls, and both transgender respondents. Slightly more than one in five respondents (11 or 22%) describe instances of being filmed for pornography. The majority of those disclosing instances in which they were filmed for pornography were male (6) along with three females and both transgender respondents.

Same Same But Different (2019)

Same Same But Different⁵⁶ which was conducted in Bangkok with 60 transgender people working in the sex industry by two of the same authors as this study (Davis and Miles). Interviews were

⁵⁶ Davis, J.D., Miles, G.M. and Quinley III, J.H. (2019), “Same same, but different”: A baseline study on the vulnerabilities of transgender sex workers in the sex industry in Bangkok, Thailand”, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 39 No. 7/8, pp. 550-573. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-01-2019-0022>

conducted with self-identified transgender sex workers within or near these areas. Thirty-eight interviews were collected from freelance workers and 22 in bar-based establishments.

Respondents were then asked to discuss what brought them into the entertainment industry, as opposed to any other form of work. A strong majority, or 81% of respondents, indicate coming into the entertainment industry due to direct financial needs, this includes 25 people who indicated that they perceived that they could earn significantly more money through this mode of work and 18 people who indicated they saw this as a form of “easy money.” Greater than four out of five respondents, or 82%, indicate that they were introduced into the entertainment/sex industry through a friend. Eight people, or 14% indicated that they came into the industry through their own means, and two people (or 4%) were introduced into the industry through a relative. Many of the respondents indicate differing levels of agency in sex work and state wanting to be involved because of easy money, satisfaction, feeling empowered, and freedom in the business. Some found using their gender expression as an easy way to pursue goals in the sex industry.

The ages of respondents ranged 28 years, the youngest respondents reporting to be 18 years of age and the oldest reporting to be 46 years of age. Over half of respondents, or 53%, fall within the United Nations definition of youth, 15-24 years of age. The majority of respondents (63%) had completed between a 7th and 12th grade education. This includes more than one-third of respondents (35%) that had completed a tenth to twelfth grade education. More than one in four respondents, or 26%, indicate instances of physical assault the past 12 months. Among these cases, 55% of the assaults were committed by clients and 18% from boyfriends; other persons committing assault included mamasans (a bar “madame”, or manager). Instances of physical violence were highest among freelance sex workers, where 44% report such instances within the past 12 months and less prevalent among bar-based sex workers, where 23% indicate such instances within the past 12 months. Nearly two out of three respondents indicate instances of sexual violence (or unwanted sexual touching) within the past 12 months. 69% of these cases are said to have come from clients, 11% from games, and 6% from police. Nearly half, or 48% of those reporting sexual violence for the past 12 months indicate that this happens “always”. Sexual violence was most common among bar-based sex workers, with 89% reporting such instances, and less prevalent among freelancers, where 61% reported such instances within the past 12 months.

In addition to questions regarding physical abuse and sexual violence, respondents were asked about instances in which they were forced to have sex against their wishes. Nearly one in four respondents indicated times in which they had been forced to have sex. This number was slightly higher among respondents coming from bar-based establishments, where 27% of respondents state instances of forced sex, and slightly lower among freelancers, where 22% of respondents indicated instances of forced sex.

Globally, there is evidence that during the pandemic sex workers who previously operated offline, may be turning to online sex work due to economic hardship.⁵⁷ In the past decade the face of human trafficking has changed, and the use of online accessibility has increased. The majority of new OSEC reports are from Asia (68%)⁵⁸ but while NGOs around the world recognize the importance of mobile technology and its link to modern day child slavery, most appear to remain behind the times, lacking the knowledge, tools, and best practices that are essential to catch up with this emerging context and its related vulnerabilities.

Gender-based violence initiatives with a particular focus on the sexual exploitation of boys are not often developed, in spite of the limited available evidence suggesting that boys are more widely impacted than previously understood.⁵⁹ One of the few initiatives is the Urban Light Project in Chiang Mai. Several years have passed since Urban Lights's (UL's) first study of male sex workers, *Boys for Baht?*⁶⁰, and in recent years UL outreach workers have found a notable decrease in boys visibly present in the previously identified venues for the sex trade, namely the massage and bar based venues. On the surface, this may seem to be an improvement. However, it could also indicate that stricter policing, technological advances, and the range of 'dating' and 'hookup' apps, have pushed the sexual exploitation of children/youth underground and online.

GLOBAL INITIATIVE TO EXPLORE THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF BOYS: Thailand Report (2021)

In 2021, ECPAT International produced a study on THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF BOYS in Thailand⁶¹. Two members of the research team (Davis and Mounsher) were involved in the production of the report, and Urban Light staff facilitated and carried out data collection. The study combined online interviews with Frontline Service Providers (FSPs), and in-depth interviews with boys, young men, and SOGIE identifying youth.

ECPAT International granted permission to include and adapt some of the same scenarios used in the 2021 report to compare the answers gathered from the FSPs and the respondents of this research.

⁵⁷<https://ijmstoragelive.blob.core.windows.net/ijmna/documents/2020-10-IJM-COVID-19-Brief-on-Online-Sexual-Exploitation-of-Children.pdf?mtime=20210203041010&focal=none>

⁵⁸ <https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/handle/2104/111174>

⁵⁹ <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/news/keeping-promise-ending-violence-against-children-2030>

⁶⁰ Davis et al. (2013). [Boys for baht? An exploratory study on the vulnerability of male entertainment workers in Chiang Mai, Thailand.](#)

⁶¹ ECPAT International (2021) GLOBAL INITIATIVE TO EXPLORE THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF BOYS:

Thailand Report

https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ENG-Global-Boys-Initiative-Thailand-Report_April-2021_FINAL_2.pdf



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