BOYS FOR BAHT

an exploratory study on the vulnerability of male entertainment workers in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Jarrett Davis
Elliot Glotfelty
Glenn Miles, PhD

LOVE146

END CHILD TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

URBANlight

Be the Light for a Boy in Need
Boys for Baht?

A Baseline Study on the Vulnerability of Male Entertainment Workers in Chiang Mai, Thailand

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Jarrett Davis
Elliot Glotfelty
Glenn Miles, PhD

LOVE146
Glenn Miles, PhD
Asia Community Building Facilitator
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
glenn@love146.org

Jarrett Davis, MA
Social Researcher
Phnom Penh, Cambodia / Ohio, USA
jarrett@love146.org

URBAN LIGHT
Elliot Glotfelty
Long-Term Volunteer
Chiang-Mai Thailand / Maryland, MA
ejglotfelty@gmail.com
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Introduction

The global reality of sexual exploitation and trafficking knows no gender. Internationally, it is said that 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused before reaching adulthood and in some nations the exploitation and abuse of boys far outweighs that of girls. Yet, the sexual exploitation of men and boys is often little understood and commonly goes ignored. Social and cultural norms often assume men and boys to be inherently strong and/or invulnerable to sexual exploitation; however, research in this area continues to show these assumptions to be false. Because of this lack of awareness, the efforts of the organizations and individuals who work to provide for the needs of male victims are often sparse and under-supported.

This is the fifth study in a series of research that explores the little-known lives and experiences, vulnerabilities and resiliencies of sexually exploited young men in Southeast Asia. It is a part of a small, collaborative movement among interested organizations who have both recognized and acted upon the neglect of boys and men in discussions of sexual abuse and exploitation. The studies have utilized both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, merging careful fieldwork and one-on-one structured interviews to provide a better understanding of the lives of young men and boys within the sex trade industry as an information resource for service providers and future researchers in this area.

Love146 has made addressing the exploitation of boys a key objective in its work, and often does this by partnering with key organizations that are pioneering such endeavors. We believe that Urban Light is one of these organizations. Urban Light is a grassroots organization that has been working since 2009 to rebuild, restore, and empower the lives of boys living on the streets and/or working in the red light districts in Chiang Mai, Thailand by providing education, health services, housing and emergency care. An important part of the work done by Urban Light is advocacy, drawing support and raising awareness among NGO community, governments and donors around the world. Love146 is a long-term partner with Urban Light, and has additionally partnered with them in the development and administration of this study and worked with them in the creation of this final report, which you hold in your hands.
Executive Summary

The sexual exploitation of women and girls in Southeast Asia continues to be the subject of much research and remains a central concern among NGO’s and Anti-Trafficking in Persons organizations. As these concerns remain central, sexual exploitation and violence against men and boys is little acknowledged, much less understood. Among the studies that have been conducted on males, most have primarily focused on sexual health, seeing males as agents of their own lives and careers, and largely ignored holistic needs and vulnerabilities. This study attempts to take a holistic approach to understanding the needs and vulnerabilities of young males working in the entertainment industry in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

This study aims to provide a baseline of information about the young males providing sexual services in the Chiang Mai area. It serves to uncover some of the present needs, vulnerabilities, and potential resiliencies of these young males in order for NGOs and social service providers to better understand them and provide adequate services. In order to accomplish this, structured interviews were conducted with young men from three areas in Chiang Mai that are known to be key to the male entertainment industry. The data sampling for this study employed purposive and snowballing sampling methodologies in the recruitment of participants. In addition, Love146/Urban Light researchers worked with practitioners from Urban Light to identify key vulnerability groups and potential respondents for the study.

Structured interviews were conducted with males working in various sectors of the male entertainment industry including: male masseurs, males working in show bars, males working in KTV bars, and freelance sex-workers within bars. Vulnerabilities of these young males and were assessed, focusing on a number of key areas including: stigma and discrimination, financial security, sexual health and history, experiences of violence, substance abuse, and existential well-being. Additionally, a qualitative assessment of the broader male sex industry was completed looking at demand, recruitment, and trans-border migration issues, which served as a background to supplements quantitative data gathered from structured interviews.

The research uncovered significant numbers of trans-border migrants from Burma, as well as the high numbers of respondents migrating from tribal areas in northern Thailand. Within the working environments the young males in this study, the research finds a high dependency on tips as the sole source of income, which seems to drive entertainment workers into a higher frequency of sex work. Violence and sexual abuse was found to be common among some groups. One in four respondents reported instances
of being forced to have sex against his wishes and up to 72% of those working within bar based establishments report the same. Substance abuse was found to be a significant issue among many respondents working within bars—particularly among those working as freelancers.

The study recommends increased recognition from government, UN agencies, and donors that sexual exploitation of males does exist and may be an increasing issue. It recommends the development of greater assistance programs to young males and their families in securing alternative employment, aid in obtaining ID cards and proper citizenship, in the creation of deeper research – particularly qualitative – on younger boys living off of the streets and engaging in survival sex.
A Gender Exclusive Understanding of Vulnerability

Male sex workers are becoming more and more visible all over the world and are increasingly being seen as a commodity. However, much of the research that has been conducted on the global sex-trade has focused primarily on women (Jones, 2010). This gender-exclusive approach towards reporting sexual exploitation and sex work has overlooked the prevalence, vulnerabilities, and needs of boys and men facing these issues. The few studies that have looked at males in the sex industry have largely focused on sexual health and the spread of HIV/AIDS, ignoring the social, psychological, and other personal ramifications that sex work entails for the young males involved.

The construction of the “traditional victim” of sex trafficking and exploitation as a woman or young girl has been perpetuated through the media and government research, including the United States’ annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP), which rarely mentions men and boys as a population vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence. Men and boys were not mentioned at all as victims of sex trafficking or exploitation in Thailand’s country profile in the 2013 TIP Report (US State Department, 2013). The vulnerabilities of men and boys have either been ignored or overlooked, which has prevented this demographic from coming forward as victims and being provided essential services already provided to women and girls.

Even in developed countries such as the United States, where health services and counseling are widely available, men are still not traditionally seen as victims of sexual abuse. Dr. David Reiss, a practicing psychiatrist in the United States for the past 25 years, has worked with men who were sexually abused as children and states that “[i]t’s somehow much more shameful for a male to admit to being abused. It not only stirs their sense of weakness about being victimized but also the whole issue of sexual attitude and identity” (Gray, 2011). When the abuse is committed and vulnerabilities are exploited through the context of male sex work, it is even more easily ignored, especially in developing nations and those with strongly patriarchal societies and stigmatization of homosexuality (Patrick, 2011). In a study published in 2013 that examined gender based violence (GBV) among men who have sex with men (MSM), male sex workers, and transgendered people in Bangladesh and Papua New Guinea, non-conformity to societal norms surrounding sexuality and the criminalization of male-to-male sexual relations in these countries was cited as a primary reason for GBV. These sexual minorities described being viewed as “weak and powerless” in their communities, often a reason for exploitation (Wong & Noriega, 2012).
Perceived resiliency in young males also makes them less likely to receive attention as potential victims of sexual abuse (Grieger, 2012; Jones, 2010), despite trends that show the similar psychopathological effects of sexual abuse on both boys and girls (Spataro et al., 2010). In addition, males in Asia are just as likely, if not more likely, to be victims of abuse, as an extensive 2007 government funded study conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in India found. Over 60% of young male respondents had been victims of one or more forms of sexual abuse, while 41.12% of young female respondents had been victims of the same (Kacker et al., 2007). Despite experiencing equal, and sometimes a higher degree of sexual abuse and exploitation, boys are not as legally protected and do not have as much access to services as girls in Asia (Frederick, 2010).

The urbanization of rural populations seems to be trend that puts young males at risk for sexual exploitation throughout South and Southeast Asia. A 2006 ECPAT study of young male sex workers in Bangladesh found that increased pressure on children to provide for their families in rural villages and provinces surrounding urban centers drove many to involvement in the sex industry (Ali & Sakar, 2006). Similar findings can be found in studies on male sex workers in Thailand (Grieger, 2012), Cambodia (Davis & Miles, 2012; Miles & Blanch 2011), and the Philippines (Davis & Miles, 2013). Respondents in these studies cite a range of vulnerability factors including: lacking higher education or vocational training, a single or no parent family, family debts, ethnic minority status, and insufficient language skills as contributing factors to entering into the sex industry.

**Male Sexual Abuse in Asia and Thailand**

Male sexual abuse in Thailand is not something that has been thoroughly investigated. In a 2008 study conducted on sexual abuse of Thai children, only four “substantiated” cases of male sexual abuse were analyzed next to an additional 56 cases of girl victims (Trangkasombat, 2008). The absence of “substantiated” cases of male child sexual abuse indicates a low reporting rate of abuse and cases making it through to legal action. A recent meta-analysis of research conducted on self reported child sexual abuse (CSA) throughout the world between 1980 and 2008 found a prevalence among girls at approximately 180 cases per 1000 individuals and for boys 76 cases per 1000 individuals. Asia was found to have the lowest numbers of self-reported CSA, with girls registering 113 cases per 1000 individuals and boys 41 cases per 1000 individuals (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011). The authors cite “[t]he fairly low CSA rates for both genders in Asia . . . to be consistent with the idea that abuse experiences are less often disclosed in a collectivist culture than in individualistic cultures” (2011: 89). Cases of male sexual abuse may in fact be lower than that of girls worldwide; however, research has shown that boys are far less likely to disclose CSA at the time it occurred and also take longer
to disclose childhood experiences later in life, which may exaggerate low rates reported (O'Leary & Barber, 2008).

In a study analyzing sexual coercion among adolescents in northern Thailand, the first of its kind in the country, researchers analyzed sexual coercion of students attending vocational school through a comprehensive, cross-sectional survey of drug use and sexual behavior. Sexual coercion was reported by 6.5% of males and 21% of females with mean ages of first occurrence at 16 years (range: 8-20) and 17 years (range: 5-21) respectively. Almost 100% of females and 52% of males were sexually coerced by men, highlighting male vulnerability to not only men but also women (Manopaiboon et al., 2003). The study sites negative outcomes in regards to sexual coercion and the range of ages of first occurrence are wide throughout the sample set. The results of this study are consistent with the literature cited above in the lower reporting rates of male sexual abuse in Thailand; however, it provides further evidence of vulnerability of males in the country. The population in this survey is comprised of students training at vocational schools and presumably of stable socioeconomic backgrounds which can be inferred from their attendance to these schools. Low socioeconomic status is a binding factor among male sex workers throughout southern and southeast Asia and perpetuates vulnerability (Miles & Blanch, 2011; Miles & Davis, 2011; Miles, Thakur & Davis, 2013; Davis & Miles, 2013), and a majority of sex workers in Chiang Mai are known to be undocumented migrants from Burma or have traveled from the northern provinces from hill tribe communities (Cameron, 1996; Guadamuz et al., 2010). The lower socioeconomic status and continued marginalization of hill tribe groups and migrants make the male sex worker population in Chiang Mai even more vulnerable than the groups described in this study.

Occurrences of forced sex in Thailand among those identifying as men who have sex with men (MSM), including the male sex worker population, was analyzed in a 2011 study. A very high 18.4% of men experienced forced sex at some point in their lives, with 83.8% of these individuals having been forced by someone they knew, 67.3% forced more than once, and over half having been forced during adolescence. The study correlates experiencing forced sex with increased drug use, recruitment into the sex industry, increased male partners, and buying sex (Guadamuz et al., 2011). This particular study gives some of the clearest information regarding the vulnerability in the MSM community in Thailand, including the male sex worker population. Within the MSM sub population, there is a higher vulnerability to sexual abuse and rape than reported by populations analyzed in the literature cited above.
Literature Review - Boys Are Baht?

**Legal Protection**

**Current Laws**
The 2007 draft of the Thai Constitution specifically states that “[m]en and women shall enjoy equal rights (Part 2, Section 30, 12), yet presents contradictions for men, especially in regards to access to public health services, welfare from the state, and protections against sexual violence:

> “Children, the youth, women and family members have the right to be protected by the State against violence and unfair treatment and shall also have the right to receive rehabilitation in the event of such circumstances” (Section 52, 22)

The exclusion of men and ambiguity of “family members” leaves holes in protections given to men, specifically in reference to “unfair treatment.”

Section 40.6 makes no mention of men in terms of protection against sexual violence:

> “[T]he children, the youth, women the elderly or the disabled or persons of infirmity have the right to be accorded protection with regard to appropriate trials and have the right to receive proper treatment in cases related to sexual violence” (16)

The absence of men in this particular clause reinforces a traditional narrative of resiliency and invulnerability in men. In fact, it is the lack of protections that perpetuate vulnerabilities, especially among male sex workers who may be at higher risk for sexual violence. Though broad measures are made in the Constitution guaranteeing gender equality and legal protections, the International Commission of Jurists points out that “…it has been left to the Courts to delineate, on a case-by-case basis, what discrimination entails and what conduct is prohibited…” and “… such decisions are not frequent” (Hoctor et al., 2011: 11). This is problematic for all individuals in Thailand facing discrimination, and with lack of concrete protections, claims against perpetrators are less likely. Liz Cameron, who has written extensively on sex workers’ rights in Thailand, points out that “[r]ape under the law is still limited by definition to the insertion of the penis into the vagina, which excludes the rape of boys and men.” Furthermore, forced oral sex and other forms of violence possible against men are considered physical assaults rather than rape or sexual assault (Cameron, 2011).

**Prostitution**

Prostitution has been illegal in Thailand since the passing of the Prostitution Suppression Act of 1960, which was repealed and replaced with the Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act of 1996. The passage of this law sought to strengthen the regulations already in place; however, unclear language in regards to the definitions of prostitution and buying sex makes enforcing the law problematic. In addition, the Public
Entertainment Places Act of 1966, which continues to regulate karaoke bars, massage parlors, go-go bars, bathhouses, and similar establishments, provides a legal framework for prostitution to operate, and allows for these places of “entertainment” to employ individuals to provide “special services” without specifically defining those services. The Third Bill (ฉบับที่ 3 พ.ศ. 2521) of the act uses ambiguous language that allows establishments offering sex services to operate (sections 5.1 and 5.2):

ข้อ ๔ สถานบริการตามมาตรา ๓ (๒) ให้เปิดทำการได้ดังนี้
(๑) การจำหน่ายอาหาร น้าชา หรือเครื่องดื่มอย่างอื่น โดยมีหญิงบ้าหรึ่งผู้บริการผู้เป็นลูกค้า ให้เปิดทำการได้ระหว่างเวลา ๑๑.๐๐ น. ถึง ๒๔.๐๐ น. และระหว่างเวลา ๐๖.๐๐ น. ถึง ๒๔.๐๐ น.
(๒) การจำหน่ายอาหาร น้าชา หรือเครื่องดื่มอย่างอื่น โดยมีที่สำหรับพักผ่อนหลับนอนหรือมีบริการนวดให้แก่ลูกค้า ให้เปิดทำการได้ระหว่างเวลา ๑๑.๐๐ น. ถึง ๒๔.๐๐ น.

Translation:

Section 1: If an establishment that provides food, alcohol, tea, and other kinds of drinks and if it has a woman taking care of customers, they are allowed to open from 11am-2pm and 6pm-12am.

Section 2: If an establishment that provides food, alcohol, tea, and other kinds of drinks and if they provide a place to stay together with massage services, the establishment is allowed to open from 11am-12am.

(Translations by Monticha Puthawong and Thanaporn Phonboon)

Though there is no mention of men providing services or working in these establishments in either clause, the broad language allows for the law to be applicable to places employing men. The Thai word yingbumruh (หญิงบ้าหรื้) is used in Section 1 and literally means “woman who entertains men.” Though this is the literal meaning of the word, culturally, yingbumruh is commonly used to describe women who are paid to provide sexual services. Other than the mention of yingbumruh, there is no specific gender acknowledgment in association with various venues. The law further prevents anyone under the age of 18 from working in these establishments and customers under the age of 20 are not permitted to enter (Amendment 47, Section 16.1 and 16.2). Essentially, this law does not condone prostitution; however, the ambiguity in language allows for businesses to provide sexual services.

The passage of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E 2551 (2008) provides the clearest protections for men and boys who are victims of trafficking. Anyone committing the following is considered “guilty of trafficking in persons” in Thailand (Section 6, 2-3):

(1) procuring, buying, selling, vending, bringing from or sending to, detaining or confining, harboring, or receiving any person, by means of threat or use of force, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or of the giving money or benefits
to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person in allowing the offender to exploit the person under his control; or (2) procuring, buying, selling, vending, bringing from or sending to, detaining or confining, harboring, or receiving a child.

This law is non-discriminate with its use of the word “person” to describe victims and perpetrators.

Homosexuality and Legal Rights
Homosexuality in Thailand has a long documented history as taboo (Jackson & Sullivan, 1999) and was considered a mental disorder in the country until 2002. Thailand’s decision to remove this classification came nearly 30 years following the American Psychiatric Association (Hickey, 2011) and ten years following the World Health Organization’s decision to do the same (Cameron, 2006). Antiquated policies such as these underlie the slow moving pace Thailand has taken towards civil rights policies for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Transgender (LGBT) persons. Though Thailand has become known as an extremely tolerant country in regards to homosexuality because of the lack of legal restrictions, social sanctions for homosexuality are strong and render much of the gay community as invisible (Cameron, 2006) and “... hostage to the Thai ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy” (Sinnott, 1999). Indeed, conforming to heteronormative patterns in society allows gay identifying men in Thailand to, for the most part, escape these sanctions (Jackson & Sullivan, 1999). Though several studies on male sex workers in Thailand, including the current study, identify the majority of respondents as “heterosexual”—according to western terminology—(Kunawararak et.al., 1995; De Lind Van Wijngaarden, 1999; Guadamuz et al., 2010), these individuals plausibly face legal and social stigmatization based on their commercial sex work with other men.

Immigration and Hill Tribe Descent
Many young males seeking work in Northern Thailand are from hill tribe groups, which are commonly at an increased risk of various forms of job discrimination and exploitation. It is common for employers of hill tribe groups to offer only a fraction of the minimum wage, require long working hours, and often provide unfair or unequal treatment. In some cases, working in the sex industry or entertainment sector becomes a more appealing option to make money, providing opportunity for much more control in income and working hours. Matthew Grieger provides extensive analysis linking labor exploitation to sexual exploitation in his 2012 study conducted in Chiang Mai on young Akha (a hill tribe of northern Thailand and SE Asia) males working as freelancers in the sex industry. All of his twelve respondents worked several legal jobs (construction, restaurants, parking attendants, etc.) before entering into sex work, and cite bullying, low wages, and other forms of discrimination while working these jobs as motivating factors for entering sex work (Greiger, 2012).
**Entering Sex Work**

Grieger’s study examined the male freelance sex industry in one of Chiang Mai’s most popular tourist destinations. All respondents were of Akha hilltribe descent, and many of them were even from the same village. The phenomenon of boys from similar hill tribe descent who build communities throughout the various venues of sex work seems to be a common theme throughout the male sex industry in Chiang Mai. Not only do young males working in the sex industry form communities on their own within the bars, they are frequently recruited by these establishments based on their body size or ethnicity. Malcolm McCamish points out these recruitment tactics of Pattaya’s sex industry:

> Though larger bars cater to a wide spectrum of client tastes, smaller bars sometimes exercise a wide spectrum of client tastes, smaller bars sometimes exercise specific recruitment policies, targeting... the workers’ geographical origins or body size. This means a worker should be able to find compatible workmates by carefully selecting the bar, and quickly discovering whether or not he fits into the environment. (McCamish, 1999)

Finding “compatible” workmates often entails finding the bar where young males of similar ethnic descent are working. Northern Thailand is home to over ten hill tribe populations, all of which have different cultures, languages, and customs. Often, hill tribe rivalry or biases prevent these different groups from working well together. Compatibility of workers is important, as it is to any business, but these groups are often advertised as a selling point for the particular sex venues. McCamish’s observations of male sex worker communities in Pattaya seem to mirror the communities built in Chiang Mai’s various male sex establishments. *Gay in Chaing Mai*, an online resource catering to gay tourists, provides in depth looks at various areas of the city’s sex industry and provides locations where freelancers and host boys can be found for sex, specifically referencing ethnicity: “The guys here (a main district catering to the gay community) are almost all from the same Shan (Burmese ethnic minority) group and are friends with the guys working in the host bars.” The same article also gives readers specific locations to find freelance workers who are Akha, Lisu, and Lahu, also mentioning that many of those working are underage (BonTong, 14 Nov. 2011).

**Burmese Migrants**

BonTong, the anonymous *Gay in Chaing Mai* author of several articles describing ethnicity related to various establishments, states that there is a “surprise” in Chiang Mai that distinguishes the city’s bars from those in Pattaya and Bangkok: there are very few Thai males working in them. The author goes on to explain the appeals of Shan “refugees” according to their body types and “softer looks” and describes the Shan peoples’ persecution in Burma and the mass influx of immigrants to Chiang Mai as a result of military conflicts within Burma. Grieger’s findings, indicating a connection between prior labor exploitation and the young males’ current employment in the sex industry,
are confirmed when BonTong describes the Shan people as “[a] source of cheap labour for Chiang Mai’s virulent construction industry...” where “…many are paid only 150 [baht] ($5) for a day’s hard labour...” and that it is “no wonder [there are] scores of young Shan males try[ing] to make a living in Chiang Mai’s gay bars” (7 Nov. 2011).

From Gay in Chiang Mai news (BonTong, 25 Nov. 2011):

> “Chiang Mai and Thailand’s northern provinces bordering Burma have a large population of ethnic Shan, some indigenous, but most are refugees from the fighting in the Shan State between ethnic groups and Naypyitaw’s Burmese Army. As refugees without ID they cannot work legally in Thailand and many are exploited and forced to work in low paid manual laboring jobs to survive.”

It is notable that, even after pointing out the vulnerabilities of these young men, the online tourist guide persists in reminding readers where these young men exist in the commercial sex scene.

**Legal Status and Protection for Buyers**

Being part of an ethnic minority provides strengthened avenues for the young men working in these bars to be exploited. *Gay in Chiang Mai* states that buying sex is far safer to do from a go-go bar (show bar) because “…many of the Shan guys working go-go have work permits linked to their bars and the bar owners are responsible for them. If they get fired they also risk deportation back to Burma” (BonTong, Nov 14 2011). This is problematic as these boys’ state of citizenship could be used as a method of control and a source of protection to buyers of sex, further marginalizing these groups.

A 2010 study of male sex workers in Chiang Mai found a majority (64.8%, n=117) of sex workers interviewed from 14 different establishments to be of Shan ethnicity, highlighting the prevalence of this population in Thailand’s male sex industry and the potential for abuses and exploitation of this people group (Guadamuz et. al 2010). Grieger’s conversations with young Akha freelance sex workers also confirmed that a majority of the young men working in the Chiang Mai sex industry are Thai-Yai (ethnic Shan) (2012: 33). The vulnerabilities that male sex workers have as stateless individuals provide bar owners with increased control, often holding copies of the young men’s identification (if they have any) or work permit to provide security for customers (McCamish, 1999). Even without identification, it is possible for males to obtain permits to work in bars such as those in Chiang Mai; however, this can be a lengthy and expensive process (Forced Migration Online, 2011). Because of the lengthy processes and costs involved with receiving work permits and identification, customers can feel confident that the sex workers will not jeopardize their employment by providing a “bad experience.” If customers complain to a boss about a given sex worker, that sex worker is at risk of losing employment and potentially his work permit or ID. Refusing to provide certain services
or self defense is weighed against the possibility of deportation and perhaps the only viable form of steady income the individual can obtain.

This warning, which appears multiple times on the Gay in Chiang Mai website, highlights “protections” provided by buying sex in Chiang Mai’s show bars and KTV bars. This notice dichotomizes a warning to protect the buyers of sex with a “stop the child sex trade” graphic. As Grieger points out, the buyer of sex is seen to be far more vulnerable than the sex worker (2012: 33). Gay in Chiang Mai consistently warns tourists that prostitution is illegal in Thailand and has even published an article “survival sex” that is common in Chiang Mai. The website admonishes the underage sex scene, but does acknowledge its existence in Chiang Mai next to other easily accessible, though illegal establishments (Gay Chiangmai, 2011).

Because there are no legal protections in place for refugees, boys within this population seek work at entertainment venues because they can receive stable employment and can make considerably larger sums of money than working in traditional jobs (i.e. construction, restaurant work, labor). Bill Frelick, Refugee Program director for Human Rights Watch states that “Thailand presents Burmese refugees with the unfair choice of stagnating for years in remote refugee camps or living and working outside the camps without protection from arrest and deportation” and further cites police intolerance for these stateless citizens (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Thailand is not a member of the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 and currently lacks laws regulating the granting of refugee status to these migrants. Workers therefore may feel unsafe to report human rights abuses for fear of deportation or arrest (Hoctor et al., 2012). As mentioned above, BonTong cites this as a primary protection for buyers of sex where Shan refugees are working.

**Government ID—The Answer?**

Though lack of proper identification can be a driving force for those to enter into sex work, it should not be seen as a primary cause for the high prevalence of male sex work or that of sex workers in general throughout Thailand. Grieger mentions current literature and NGO’s persistent claims that obtaining proper identification is the primary way of prevention of trafficking, yet these claims are only substantiated in theoretical terms.
(i.e. all laws and rights regarding citizenship will be enforced and granted to individuals) (2012: 42-43). If ethnic minorities are denied legal protection by police and other officials and continue to be victims of social sanctions because of various factors, including low levels of education, minority status, and informal Thai skills, a government ID does not solve potential risks for exploitation. Of the 12 respondents in Grieger’s 2012 study, 100% possessed a Thai ID card, with an additional 15 out of 16 other male freelance sex workers not formally interviewed for the study all possessing proper government-issued ID (2012:47). Though ID was sometimes obtained through illegal (i.e. bribes etc.) or complicated means (2012:48), it may be concluded that proper identification is not an end-all solution to male sexual exploitation or male sex work in Thailand. This caveat needs to be made and other factors examined.

It is not to say that lack of proper government identification does not put men and boys at risk; however, there is little acknowledgement in the international community and literature of the risks to men and boys as a result of lacking ID. The 2013 United States Trafficking in Persons Report country narrative of Thailand states that “[l]ack of documentation continues to expose migrants to potential exploitation; in the northern areas of Thailand, lack of citizenship makes highland women and girls particularly vulnerable to being trafficked” (2013:358). Men are excluded from the conversation of trafficking and exploitation as a result of lacking government ID, but are clearly also an at risk population.

Grieger’s study only examined young Akha males, and the state of citizenship of other ethnic minority groups in Thailand may have an effect on rates of individuals entering sex work. The diversity in Thailand’s highland hill tribes does not allow for conclusions to be drawn based on one ethnic group studied; however, Grieger’s findings must also be included in the analysis of the country’s current legal framework in the prevention of sexual exploitation and trafficking.

**Masculinity and Sexual Identity in Thailand and SE Asia**

It is important to preface a discussion on sexuality in Thailand and SE Asia with the understanding that concepts of sexual identity in the West cannot be applied to these cultures. Assuming a gay or bisexual identity in Thailand is a relatively new concept, and the construct of “sexual orientation” had not been translated in Thai for academic use prior to 1996 (Taywaditep *et al.*, 2004). In addition, performing sex acts with someone of the same gender does not necessarily imply an individual self-identifies as homosexual (Wijngaarden, 1999; Jackson, 1999), and studies on men who have sex with men (MSM) show this to be true throughout Thailand, India, Cambodia, and the Philippines (Kunawararak *et al.*, 1995; De Lind Van Wijngaarden, 1999: 191; Guadamuz *et al.*, 2010; Davis & Miles, 2011; Miles, Thakur & Davis, 2013; Davis & Miles, 2013). These studies present data that show a large majority of male sex workers to be men who
prefer to have sex with women, and by western definition, heterosexual. The dichotomy of gender and perceptions of culturally bred ideas of normative sexuality in the west and throughout the world, provides inadequate pretext to discussions of masculinity, especially in Thailand. Indeed, Thai culture presents a wide range of self-identified sexualities and maintenance of masculinity, as scholar Peter A. Jackson highlights:

“Between the behavioural phenomenon of male-male sex and the sexual identity of gayness lies a complex of behavioural, psychological, attitudinal, and social factors (p.21). . . The parameters of the diverse range of possible contexts within which Thai males come together for sexual reasons are general to Thai culture and are not unique to male homoerotic contacts” (1995: 38).

Because of these complexities in describing sexuality, it is considered acceptable to call groups of male sex workers “men who have sex with men,” or MSM. Most of the NGO community working with this population describes individuals in this way. This label does not imply self-identified sexuality or gender, but allows for all male sex workers to be discussed collectively. Ambiguity in terms used to describe sexuality in Thailand allow many Thai men to “. . . avoid self-categorization as homosexual and thereby preserve their masculine self-image” (Storer, 1999: 144). Jan W. De Lind Wijngaarden (1999: 191) outlines varying categories of male sexual identities in Thailand:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>phu-chai</td>
<td>A normatively masculine male, often colloquially called a “real man.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gay king</td>
<td>prefers insertive role in sex with men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gay queen</td>
<td>prefers receptive role in sex with men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gay</td>
<td>sexually versatile, no preferred sexual role in relations with men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sua bai</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kathoey</td>
<td>Transgender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though these categorizations have been used in previous studies (Wijingaarden, 1999: 191; Storer, 1999: 145), they remain problematic in that identity and associated behaviors are often contradictory. For example, a male sex worker may engage in the insertive role during sex, but may identify as phu-chai and not necessarily as a gay king (192). The types of sexual acts and role performed are far more important in determining one’s self-identity, rather than the gender of the sex partner. In Thailand, contrary to strict western definitions regarding masculinity and sexuality, the “…inserter is relatively
unstigmatised and generally maintains his masculinity [even] in homosexual encounters" (Storer, 1999: 146).

**Social Hierarchy**
The complexities involved for Thai male sex workers to maintain a sense of masculinity during homosexual sex is further complicated when the buyers of sex are Thai men. A complex social hierarchy based upon merit exists in Thailand, and expectations from an individual in a higher social standing (i.e. the buyer) are assumed; these “expectations” may include sexual acts that a sex worker would not normally consider (Wijngaarden 1999: 209). Though maintaining self-perceived and socially-accepted concepts of masculinity in the context of male sex work is important, the need for money and the sex worker’s already vulnerable position may promote sexual behavior that the individual would not normally engage in.

Thailand’s complicated pronoun system provides additional insight into the importance of social standing and hierarchy in Thai society. Unlike the English language, where the pronoun system must consider gender, number of individuals, and person, the Thai system of pronouns is much more complex and considers “social identities and social status (e.g., age, sex, education, occupation, etc.), social and interpersonal relationships, and the social setting of the interaction and its level of formality” (Baron, 1998). This particularly puts male sex workers in Thailand at a very high risk of vulnerability and sexual exploitation, especially with Thai clients who maintain a position of power as the buyer. In a 1999 study of male sex workers in Pattaya, McCamish highlights the sex worker’s preference for farang clients over Thai clients because of foreigners’ ignorance of hierarchies of the Thai social system. He further explains the “[w]orkers would be less likely to complain to a Thai client and would find it much harder to challenge a refusal to use condoms by a Thai, who would assume a socially superior position as a client” (1999: 173). This compromise in maintaining the “masculine” role in sex may be considered an acceptable invasion of his masculinity because it is a result of his lower status in Thai social hierarchy rather than a perceived feminine gender identity.
Methodology

Sampling
Purposive and snowball sampling methodologies were used in gathering respondents for this study. The study's design employed a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Structured interviews were conducted with 51 young male entertainment workers from three main areas within Chiang Mai, which are known to be key to the male entertainment industry. The sampling included two main groups of entertainment workers: male masseurs (51% of sampling) and bar-based entertainment workers (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 within bars as freelancers who are not directly employed by the bar (n=8).

Research Instrument
The survey for this study was adapted for the Thai cultural context from a similar survey developed by Jasmir Thakur of the Samabhavana Society in Mumbai, India and Glenn Miles of Love146. In adapting this survey to be used for the present study, questions were reviewed and scrutinized by the lead researcher and a select team of Thai and expatriate social work practitioners to ensure their relevance within the social and cultural contexts of northern Thailand. The survey was a combination of multiple choice and open-ended questions covering areas including: demographics; relationships; personal and family finances; issues of prejudice, stigma and discrimination; migration; sexual identity and personal sexual history; sexual health; substance abuse; sexual violence and abuse; income generation; dignity and future planning.

All survey interviews were conducted in the Thai language by three native Thai speakers and one Thai-fluent. Interviewers sought to establish rapport with respondents prior to the survey and provided each respondent with information concerning: the research and its purpose; assurance of anonymity and confidentiality; information regarding the personal and sensitive nature of the interview questions; and their right to choose not to answer any question, stop the survey, and/or withdraw from the study at any time.

Ethical Considerations:
All interviewers were provided with careful research and ethical training using UNIAP ethical guidelines to ensure that respondents were provided with respect and that culturally appropriate language was used before, during, and after each interview. As a precaution, all interviews were held in public venues and within close range of other members of the research team to ensure safety and accountability.
Definitions of Establishments:

Male massage establishments are defined in this study as venues that exclusively employ male masseurs for massage services. Sexual services can be more or less overt within these establishments. In some, masseurs are assigned numbers and displayed behind a glass showcase – sometimes shirtless – for clients to choose. Books resembling menus are given to patrons upon entry, often with pictures of individual masseurs (usually shirtless) in poses that are often sexually suggestive. Many massage establishments have websites where masseurs can be viewed in a similar fashion. Prices for massage services are usually structured based upon the type and length of service and require minimum tip depending on what service is provided. While sexual services are usually not defined as such in writing, there are generally alternatives sets of massage services in which sexual services are implied, though some establishments were very open about providing these erotic massages.

Additionally, a number of establishments offer “outcall services” in which individual masseurs can be chosen to go to off-site, private locations where services are then provided. These services are more expensive and also include minimum tips based on services provided.

Male KTV bars are defined as bar/restaurant establishments in which clients can either rent a table or reserve a private room in which they will sing along with karaoke music videos. Employees at these establishments are expected to entertain clients, serving them food and drinks and joining them at their tables and in privately rented rooms. The KTV bar included in the current study is listed as a “host bar” in various online tourist resources catering to the gay community. As a “host bar,” clients are free to choose boys to take to another location where sexual services can be provided.

Male show bars are defined as establishments in which males are usually paid to dance, either nude or semi nude on a stage in front of clients. Males within these establishments are often assigned numbers, and can be “purchased” to join clients at their table for the night, or to be taken out of the establishment—usually for a fee paid to the bar. In some establishments, everyone from the hosts, to the waiters, to the dancers on stage are available for purchase.

Freelance bars are defined as open bars at which young males who are not employed by the bar will join clients at their tables. These males will often offer their company – and sometimes a shoulder rub or other services at the bar and may be taken home for sex or other services.
Limitations

One of the key limitations of the current study is that data collected is limited to establishments that granted the research team access to employees. For this reason, information gathered from respondents only presents a partial picture of the commercial male sex industry in Chiang Mai. Four out of five show-bars denied the research team access to employees with many massage parlors doing the same. Reasons varied for these establishments denying our team access, but many were suspicious of our team’s intentions and perhaps feared legal backlash for participation in the study.

Data collected relies upon self-reporting, which may limit the scope of understanding of the issues many of the boys working in sex establishments may have. In several of the establishments where interviews were carried out, management watched participants or was present or nearby during the entire interview. Disclosure of accurate information such as age, sexual services provided, pay schemes, and working environments, in particular, may be reported inaccurately out of protection of the establishment and prevention of potential punishment from employers. Following data collection, the research team has been informed that several respondents reporting an age of 18 or older during data collection are actually under the age of 18. Freelancers were the only respondents disclosing ages under 18 and it is likely that participants in the current study who work in the entertainment sector gave false ages in order to protect their work establishment. In order to work at “a place of entertainment” (i.e. massage parlor, bar, KTV bar, sauna, etc.) as defined by the Entertainment Places Act of 1966, individuals must be at least 18 years old. Disclosure of actual age may have presented risks to respondent’s employment.

As Thai was not the first language for a number of respondents, language barriers presented a few issues during several of the interviews. The research team included a native Akha speaker, which allowed better administration of the survey to many participants; however, this individual was not available for every interview where language barriers presented issues. During the data cleaning process, responses were omitted from final results in cases where the respondents seemed to misunderstand a particular question.

While all interviewers were trained to administer the survey in the same manner, several questions presented different levels of understanding from both the respondents and interviewers. For example, in reviewing the collected interviews a number of respondents were found to have understood the question regarding “first sexual experience” as their “first positive sexual experience” and may have excluded instances of abuse or rape. Our team intended to use this question to investigate whether prior sexual abuse as a child was a theme with male sex workers. Additionally, clarification of questions to respondents by different interviewers may have caused for different interpretations of
the questions by respondents. Questions where there were clearly misunderstandings in wording have been omitted from the report. The survey was originally written in English and then translated to Thai by native speakers with university degrees in English. After administering many of the surveys, it came to the attention of the research team that intended meaning of the question was not interpreted correctly into Thai causing for some confusion in the responses among the study’s participants. Again, questions/responses where there were consistent misunderstandings have been omitted from the report.

With regard to ethnicity, our team can only make limited inferences on our respondents based upon birthplace, coupled with qualitative data gathered during field interviews. Language barriers presented the most evidence of Shan (Thai-Yai speaking) individuals. Our native Akha interviewer discerned differences in hill tribe origins through his knowledge of the Akha and Thai Yai languages spoken by many hill tribes in the northern regions of Thailand. Fourteen respondents were not directly asked about their places of birth; however, three of these individuals disclosed birthplace in in qualitative responses to other questions throughout the survey. The eleven respondents who were not asked about birthplace are employed male massage and are working as freelance sex workers. Based on qualitative observations, trends reported in the current study in regards to respondent origin seem consistent and reliable (i.e. origins vs. place of employment, etc.)

Questions specifically asking ethnicity should be included in future studies for increased understanding of challenges presented by different hill tribe groups/ ethnic minorities.
Results

Demographics

Ages: The respondents’ ages ranged from 15 to 35 years of age, with a mean age of 22 years. The median age is slightly higher due to two respondents who reported to be significantly older than others (33 and 35 years of age). Three respondents in the study admitted to being under the age of 18, one reported to be 15 years of age, and two reported to be 17 years of age. More than 80% of all respondents fall within the UNICEF definition of youth (15-24 years of age). There is some difficulty in gathering accurate data on the ages of young males working in this industry as Thai law requires all employees (as per the Entertainment Places Act of 1966) to be 18 years of age. During several interviews, supervisors were in close proximity, which may have prevented accurate age reporting. This combined with harsher legislation for child abuse and endangerment has forced many entertainment workers to hide their work or to provide false ages, to protect themselves from getting in trouble with pimps or police. Given this, it should be noted that ages shown here are merely “reported ages” and it is understood that many respondents in this study may, in fact, be younger than what they report.
Ages reported in this study are relatively younger than those ages reported in previous studies in this series conducted among male masseurs in the Philippines and Cambodia. In Siem Reap, males in the massage industry reported an age range of 14 years, the youngest reporting to be 18 and the oldest 32 (Miles & Davis, 2012). The median age of respondents in this study was 23.5 years. Similarly, male masseurs in Manila, Philippines reported ages ranging from 18 to 37 years old (a 14-year range), with a median age of 24 years (Davis & Miles, 2013). Ages among male entertainment workers in Chiang Mai were found to be higher than ages reported in previous research conducted in Mumbai, India among 77 male street-masseurs. This study found that 9% of the young men surveyed to be aged 10-12 years old and 55% were aged 13-15 years old (Miles & Thakur, 2013). It should be noted that each of the studies only reflect data gathered from male entertainment workers and masseurs that were readily visible to the public and do not include those individuals who are understood to be available for sexual services who are hidden from the public and available only through private access.

**Education:** One in five of the respondents interviewed reported having no formal education. A strong majority, or 80% of all respondents indicated having ended their education before the 10th grade and nineteen people, or nearly 40% of all respondents, reported ending their education between the seventh and ninth grades. On the contrary, 10% cited having some post secondary education and one person, 27, from a male massage establishment cited having completed college.

**Migration:** Nearly all respondents were found to be members of various ethnic minority groups from Thailand and nearby Burma. Respondents were asked to indicate their birthplace. The majority, or 58%, indicated that they were born in Thailand, with 47% citing their birthplace as northern Thailand and 11% citing Isaan. Nearly two in five, or 39% of respondents, indicated being born in Burma, and 19% indicated being born in Thailand, near the Burmese border. While it was not asked specifically in this study, it would be useful in future studies to ask respondents to self-identify as a particular ethnicity, rather than extrapolating those ethnicities from birthplace, language, and field data.

**Entrance into Entertainment work:** The ages at which respondents reported entering into entertainment work had a mean age of 20 years. These ages ranged 14 years, the youngest beginning entertainment work at 13 years of age and the oldest beginning at 27 years of age. More than one in five, or 21% of respondents reported entering into sex work before the age of 18. Slightly less than half, or 45% reported entering into sex work before the age of 20. 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.
Respondents were asked their reasons for entering into the entertainment industry in an open-ended question where they were free to answer however they wished. Responses were then categorized into major themes and analyzed accordingly. The majority, or 41% of respondents indicated entering the entertainment industry because they “needed money”. One in four indicated entering the industry because it was perceived to be “easy work” or because the schedule was flexible, and 12% indicated entering the industry because they had “no other options”.

**Income / Financial implications:**

**Income:** Reported incomes varied greatly between the various outlets of male entertainment work. The average income reported over all respondents was 3,400 THB (110 USD) within the past week. This number is somewhat offset by one respondent, 27, from a male massage establishments who reported significantly higher earnings, 15,000 THB (450 USD) within the past week. While there were a few higher earners, it should be noted that nearly one third of respondents (31%) reported earning less than 1,200THB (36 USD) within the past week and 49% reported earning 2,100THB (63 USD) or less within the past week. By far, the lowest earners were those working in bars as freelancers, reporting an average of 1,450THB (45 USD) a week; this is 41% lower than those working in other outlets of male entertainment work. The group reporting the highest earnings where those working in KTV bars, who reported earnings of 3,720THB (112 USD) a week. Among all respondents, 88% indicated that sex work/entertainment work is their only source of income.
Reliance on Tips: Respondents were asked the ways in which they received money for their work. The majority of respondents, or 43%, indicated that they relied upon tips as the sole means through which they received income. Only 14% of respondents indicated that they received an hourly wage for their work – most of which were masseurs. Nearly one third indicated that they received both wage and tips as income – the majority in this group coming from those working in KTV bars. Looking across the various outlets of male entertainment work, more than 71% of respondents working in show bars relied upon tips as their sole source of income – and received no other wage. Slightly over half, or 54% of those within male massage establishments relied solely upon tips for their income.

In comparison with previous studies, meager hourly wage and a high reliance on tips as the sole source of income seems to be a common phenomenon. In our previous study conducted in Manila Philippines, 50% of all respondents, and 84% of those coming from male massage establishments indicated that they relied upon tips as their sole form of income.

Debt and Financial Obligations: Debt and the obligation to support family members was found to be a major factor to both bring respondents into the industry and to hold them there. Seventy percent of respondents report sending their earnings to support family members. A number of these respondents indicated having sick or aging parents who could no longer take care of themselves, while others indicated having younger siblings who needed financial support, including support for tuition fees.
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Personal Sexual History

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 ranged 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%, indicated that their first partner was a male and 72% indicated that the first partner was female.

Sexual Orientation: Looking at the sexual orientation of respondents, descriptions of sexual orientation categories were used in place of international/western or colloquial terms denoting sexual orientation. This was done to avoid divergent interpretations of LGBT categorizations. The majority of respondents, or 68%, identified as heterosexual (a male preferring sex with females), and only one in five (20%) identified as homosexual (a male preferring sex with other males). Lastly, 12% identified as bisexual (a male who has equal preference for sex with both males and females alike).

Commercial Sexual Experiences

Sex work: The number of clients that respondents reportedly met for sex within the past week ranged from zero to eight persons. Respondents with the highest rates of meeting clients for sex within the past week were from show bars, which reported an average of 2.75 clients met for sex within the past week. This was followed by respondents from male massage establishments, which reported meeting an average of 2.65 clients for sex within the past week. Respondents working as freelancers in bars and those from KTV bars indicated the lowest frequencies of meeting clients for sex, with an average of 1 and .70 clients met for sex within the past week, respectively. More than 15% of respondents indicated meeting five or more clients for sex within the past week.
Filmed for Porn: Respondents were asked if they had ever been filmed or photographed for pornography. Twenty-nine percent of respondents, or 13 people, indicated that they had. 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.

The overall reported rate of respondents being filmed for pornographic films was similar to that which was found in our previous work among male masseurs and Metro Manila, where 24% of respondents indicate being filmed for pornography.

Foreign Clients: Lastly, respondents were asked to identify what percentage of their clients they perceived to be foreign. These questions dealing with the nationality of clients were included in the research instrument so as to bring light to the common assumption that sex work is a solely foreign-driven phenomenon. The perceived rate of foreign clients varied greatly depending upon the area of Chiang Mai where data was gathered. Overall, 51.69% of clients were perceived to be foreign. This rate varied significantly between different areas of the city. Respondents working within the Santitam area (n=17) cited that an average of 28% of their clients were foreign. Respondents working within the Chiangmai Land area (n=13) cited that 19% of their clients, on average, were foreign. This was significantly lower than those working within the Night Bazaar area (n=21), where respondents perceived 82% of their clients to be foreign, on average. This divergent rate is due to the fact that the Night Bazaar area is more commonly visited by foreign tourists and backpackers, while other areas in Chiang Mai are more commonly visited by locals and only some long-term ex-pats.

Overall, this is a significantly higher perceived rate of having foreign clients than what was found among male masseurs working in Metro Manila. The study in Manila found
that only about 7% of clients were perceived to be foreign, with 40% of clients indicating that they have no foreign clients at all. However, similar to the data from Chiang Mai, the only areas in Metro Manila where respondents indicated having relatively higher rates of foreign clients were in areas known for foreign tourism.

**Emotional Well Being**

**Stigma/Discrimination:** A series of questions were asked regarding stigma and discrimination that was experienced by respondents. Among the 41 participants responding to this question, twenty-two people (or 43%) of these indicated that they experience stigma or discrimination due to their work in the sex industry. Of this group, 45% of respondents indicated that this stigma or discrimination comes from friends. Eighteen percent indicated family, 18% indicated strangers, and 14% noted various other sources of stigma and discrimination. The majority of respondents indicated that they did not regularly experience any stigma or discrimination due to their work in the sex industry. This may be due to the often hidden nature of sex work among males. That is, if family and community members are unaware of their work in the industry, it may not be likely that respondents would receive stigma or discrimination. However, this may not necessarily rule out other social and emotional costs of non-disclosure.

Respondents were asked about the awareness of partners, family and community members regarding their work in the sex industry. The majority of respondents (69% or 33 people) indicated that their family members were presently unaware of their work in the entertainment industry. A similar number of respondents (67% or 24 people), indicated that their housemates were equally unaware of their work. Beyond this, one in four (or 25%) indicated that they had not disclosed their work to their partners (spouses, girlfriends/boyfriends).

**Feelings:** Respondents were asked to recount negative feelings associated with their work over the past 12 months. Of the 41 people responding to this question, the most prevalent were feelings of shame, reported by 20 respondents or 49%, followed by low self-esteem reported by 15, or 37% of respondents. Guilt was reported by nearly one-third of respondents or 13 people. Other negative emotions associated with their work were self-blame reported by 15% (or six people) and feelings that they should be punished reported by 10% (or four people).

Prevalence of negative emotions varies greatly among respondents coming from different outlets of male entertainment work. While 50% of those in bar-based entertainment work reported feelings of shame, only 25% of male masseurs reported the same. Following a similar pattern, 32% of those in bar-based entertainment work reported low self-esteem, while 22% of those in male massage reported the same. On the contrary, guilt was more common among male masseurs (28%) than it was among bar-based entertainment workers (14%). Similarly, self-blame was more common among male
masseurs (14%) than it was among bar-based entertainment workers (5%). Lastly, male masseurs were the only group to report feelings that they “deserved punishment”.

Substance Abuse

Looking at alcohol usage across the various outputs of male entertainment work, respondents working within show bars had notably the highest rate of alcohol consumption with nearly 70% of the group indicating that they drink “very much” and the remainder of the group citing moderate alcohol consumption. This was followed by those respondents working as freelancers within bars. Nearly two-thirds of this group indicated that they drink “very much”. Rates of high alcohol consumption were then followed by those respondents within KTV bars, and lastly those within male massage establishments. Overall, 51% of respondents indicated alcohol usage during sexual encounters with their clients. This rate is about 20% higher than what was found among male masseurs working in Metro Manila, where 31% of respondents indicating that they used alcohol during sexual encounters with their clients.

Respondents were then asked of the frequency with which they use alcohol during intercourse with their clients. Nearly 50% of those coming from bar-based establishments (freelance-bars, show-bars and KTV Bars), cited that they are “always” under the influence or alcohol during sexual intercourse with their clients, and one in three from this group (29%) stated that this happens “sometimes”.

Nearly 12% of male entertainment workers in Chiang Mai, or six people, indicated usage of illegal drugs. In our previous research in Siem Reap Cambodia and Phnom Penh, similarly low rates of reported illegal drug usage were found. This is in great contrast to what was found in the Philippines, where in Manila, 42% of respondents reported usage of illegal drugs, with cocaine being the most commonly reported drug to be used.
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**Violence and Sexual Abuse**

1 in 4 respondents have been forced to have sex against their wishes (by clients)
*72% from bar based sex work

60% of respondents have experienced unwanted sexual touching in the past 12 months
*32% of respondents experience “often” or “always”

Nearly one in four respondents indicated that they had been forced or coerced by clients to have sex against their wishes. Six people, or 12%, indicated that this happened “always”. One person stated that this happens “very often”, and four people indicated that this happens “sometimes”. The rates of forced or coercive sex were markedly higher among respondents coming from bar-based sex work, where nearly three out of four reported instances of being forced to have sex against their wishes. Respondents were then asked if they were aware of other males in their profession who are being forced to have sex against their wishes. Responses to this question were similar in that 24% stated that they were aware of others being forced to have sex against their wishes, and 76% indicated that they were not.

Three out of five, or 60% of respondents report instances of unwanted sexual touching within the past 12 months. One third of this group stated that this happens “always”, 11% stated that this happens “often” and another third stated that this has happened “a few times”. When asked who the person or group is who usually sexually harasses them, all but two indicated that they had been sexually harassed by clients. Two respondents indicated instances of physical assaults over the past year. One says this happened once, and the other says this has happened “a few times”.

Rates of being forced to have sex against one’s wishes in Chiang Mai was found to be somewhat lower than what was found among male masseurs working in Cambodia and the Philippines. In Siem Reap, nearly 46% of all respondents indicated instances in which they were forced to have sex against their wishes and in Manila, 37% of respondents indicated the same.
Access to Sexual Health Education and Services

Among respondents reporting to have met at least one client for sex within the past week, four respondents (13%) indicated that they did not use a condom. Two respondents indicated that they had never used a condom before. Comparing condom usage across various outlets of male entertainment work, the only instances of not using condoms during sex with clients were found among freelancers working in bars. Respondents from all other outlets indicated that a condom was used with all clients met for sex over the past week.

Regarding sexual health education, 22% (or 11 people) indicated that they had not had such education, while 78% (or 40 people) stated that they had. While only three and four indicated having had sexual health education, slightly higher rates of having been provided sexual health services (condoms, STI testing) were found among respondents. All but seven respondents, or 86% indicated that they have been provided with some form of sexual health services such as being provided with condoms or STI/HIV testing.

Respondents were asked the modes through which HIV is transmitted, responses to these questions were open ended and respondents could answer with any response that they believed was true. Eighty-six percent of respondents indicated "sex" as their first answer. More than one third of respondents specifically mentioned "unprotected sex." Other responses included "blood" (12% or four people) and "needles" (6% or two people).

Lastly, respondents were asked a series of questions regarding symptoms of STIs that they have or have not experienced over the past six months. Six percent of respondents (or three people) indicated having experienced urethral discharge, difficulty passing urine, or pain in their testicles within the past six months; and 8% (or four people) indicated rashes, ulcerations, or lumps in their genital area within the past six months. Twenty-nine percent (or 14 people) indicated the presence of other symptoms or illnesses within the past three months. Among this group, 33% indicated having a cold, 40% indicated having a fever or the flu, 13% indicated having chronic headaches, and 27% indicated having a sore throat.

Spiritual/Existential Well Being: Interviews with respondents concluded with a series of questions dealing with spirituality and their existential well being. Respondents were asked where they hope to be in two years time. This was an open-ended question and respondents were encouraged to respond in whatever way they felt was true. The majority of respondents, 47%, stated that were unsure as to where they would be in two years time. More than one-third of respondents indicated that they wanted to see something better for themselves and hoped to, in some way, change their present situation. Comprising this group were 23% of total respondents citing that they hope to have a new job and 13% of total respondents who similarly cited that they hope to have
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a better life. Two respondents cited that they saw themselves having a family, and another two cited that they would more than likely remain in their current career.

In conjunction with this, respondents were asked to define some of the biggest obstacles presently facing them in their lives. The majority of responses detailed financial constraints, having to pay for sick relatives, and taking care of their siblings’ education. Twenty-two percent of respondents stated that sending money home/ supporting their family is their biggest obstacle in life, while another 25% cited personal financial struggles.
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Discussion

Key Vulnerabilities

Bar-based Entertainment workers: This group includes respondents from KTV bars, show bars, and respondents working as freelance sex workers within bars. On average, respondents coming from these establishments were found to be younger than those working in massage establishments by an average of 2.5 years, reported higher rates of alcohol consumption, and were found to be significantly more likely to be under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol during sexual encounters with their clients, relative to respondents coming from massage establishments. Additionally, bar-based establishments were the only outlet of male entertainment work where boys under the age of 18 were readily found to be working. Bar-based establishments were also found to be a common destination for trans-border migrants into Chiang Mai. All but three respondents having migrated from Burma (or 79% of Burmese migrants) were found to be working within bar-based establishments.

Freelancers working in bars: Respondents from this group were found to be among the youngest of all respondents interviewed with an average age of 20.75 years. Additionally, all respondents in this study who reported being under the age of 18, were working as freelancers within bars. Education rates were significantly lower, on average, than respondents coming from male massage and KTV establishments. While all respondents reported having at least some form of primary education, it is significant that no one working within this group reported having an education beyond the eighth grade. Seemingly higher instances of "survival sex”, or instances in which sexual services might be exchanged for basic needs, were observed among freelancers working in bars. In addition to this, members of this group indicated a very low awareness of sexual health issues, and were found to be least likely to use condoms during sexual encounters with their clients. Substance abuse was also found to be a significantly higher for members of this group. More than half of respondents working as freelancers within bars, or 57%, indicated that they are "always" under the influence of alcohol when they meet their clients for sex.

Show Bars: Respondents working within show bars were found to be some of the youngest among those interviewed (the majority being 18-21 years old) and indicated the lowest levels of education among all groups interviewed, with 50% of the group having had no education at all. In addition to this, respondents from this group indicated some of the highest frequencies of meeting clients for sex and indicated the second highest frequencies of being under the influence of alcohol during sexual encounters with their clients (second only to those working as freelancers in bars). Several data points coupled with field data and anecdotal information from former employees of show bars indicated high levels of vulnerability and structural exploitation. Not only
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were respondents from show bars found to be more likely to meet clients for sex with a high frequency, but they were also found to be the most reliant upon tips as their sole source of income. While this initial data does raise some significant concern for the young males working within these establishments, it should be noted that this quantitative data comes from a limited sampling. In future studies, a broader sampling from a larger number of respondents working within show bars would be useful in order to verify these apparent trends.

Showbar Case 1: Because the research team was denied access to four out of the five showbars that they approached, overall information regarding the inner workings of the establishments is limited. Our team was, however, able to gather information from a former employee of a particular showbar (who is included as a KTV bar respondent within the current study) that had vehemently denied our team access during data collection. The respondent reported a much more stressful work environment in the showbar than at his current employment at the KTV bar. Though his hours at the KTV bar are much longer (9PM-6AM) than at the showbar (9PM-1AM), he reported that there was far less pressure in the KTV Bar to engage in sex work because there, he is a guaranteed base pay of 100Baht per night that he works and there is more opportunity to earn tips from serving drinks. The respondents indicated that he received no salary at the showbar where he was previously employed and his pay was entirely service-based, relying on tips from serving drinks and sex work. He also reported that some nights he would have sex with multiple customers (sometimes up to three) and needed to use performance enhancing drugs (PDEs) often. In addition, the respondent indicated that he was under greater pressure to engage in sex work at the show bar in that the establishment was only open 4 hours a night and there was no guaranteed salary, thus earning a living depended upon his ability to go home with customers. At the KTV bar, the respondent reported that he did not rely on PDEs as he did not leave the bar with multiple customers in one evening. Shorter working hours highly incentivized sex work at the showbar.

It is important to point out that this particular respondent was able to leave employment at this particular establishment and decided to begin working at a KTV bar located nearby. He reported higher satisfaction with the work at the KTV bar based on less pressure to do sex work outside of the bar.

KTV Bars: Respondents working within KTV Establishments were found to have a mean age of 21.5 years and were somewhat older than those working within other outlets of bar-based entertainment work. Slightly over half of respondents working within KTV Establishments (55.9% of the group or 5 people) were found to have migrated from Burma, and only 20% of this group had received greater than an 8th grade education. While respondents working in KTV Establishments indicated lower frequencies of meeting clients for sex, they reported high frequencies of instances in which they had been forced to have sex against their wishes (50% of the group indicating that sex with clients is “always” against their wishes), similar to what is reported by respondents from other outlets of bar-based sex work.

Massage Establishments: Respondents from massage establishments reported an average age of 23.5 years, which is slightly older than the mean age of all entertainment workers of 22.2 years of age. While male masseurs were found to have slightly higher rates of education than those working in bar based establishments, 75% of respondents within this group reported that they had not received beyond a 9th grade education and more than one in five (21%) reported to have had no education at all. While all
respondents from male massage establishments were expected to provide sexual services to clients, and also reported some of the highest frequencies of meeting clients for sex within the past week, levels of vulnerability and agency in their sex work seemed to vary greatly between massage establishments. Some establishments functioned as a traditional job, where masseurs would arrive, work for a few hours, and leave. However, numerous respondents indicated living at the massage establishment itself. Nearly 50% of respondents from one particular establishment reported living at the massage parlor and field data indicates this to be a common trend among other massage parlors.

**Migration**

All but three respondents indicated migrating to the Chiang Mai area. Of this group, 66% indicated that they had migrated to the Chiang Mai area in search of work. A large portion of these, or 39% of all respondents, were found to be trans-border migrants from Burma, which shares a nearby border with Thailand to the north of Chiang Mai. While the number of trans-border migrants was significant, qualitative data indicates that a majority of entertainment workers had migrated from tribal/ethnic minority areas in Thailand. Only one respondent specifically indicated to be a Thailand native. Anecdotally, this person also indicated that he was able to earn notably more than other respondents working in his establishment due to his ethnic origin. Nearly three-fourths of these respondents, 71%, indicated actively sending their earnings from sex/entertainment work home in support of family members. Some respondents indicated supporting sick or elderly parents living in provincial areas, while others indicated having to support the education and/or financial needs of their younger siblings.

**Origin Country VS Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Schooling</th>
<th>4th to 6th Grade</th>
<th>7th to 9th Grade</th>
<th>10th to 12th Grade</th>
<th>Vocational College</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.1* compares the levels of education found among migrant and non-migrant respondents.

Significant differences were noted between migrants from tribal or ethnic minority areas in Thailand and trans-border migrants from Burma. The majority of Burmese migrants were uneducated, with 50% indicating having had no education at all. Slightly more than one-fifth, or 21% indicated completing a fourth to sixth grade education. Looking at respondents coming from areas within Thailand the majority of respondents, or 57%, indicated completing a seventh to ninth grade education.
It was also apparent that Burmese and Thai immigrants tended to populate different types of entertainment work within Chiang Mai. The majority of Thai entertainment workers (57% or 12 people) were found to be working within male massage establishments, while a strong majority of Burmese migrant workers – nearly 80% (or 11 people) – were found to be working within bar-based establishments (36% in KTV bars, 14% as freelancers in bars, and 29% in show bars).

**Agency and Entering into Sex Work**

Forty-one percent of respondents cited their financial circumstances as the primary reason for entering into sex work. Of these respondents, a strong majority, or 81%, also reported sending money home in support of their families. Among the six respondents that stated having “no other options” (12% of total respondents) state the following reasons for entering the sex industry:

- “It was very hard finding a job and no one accepted me, so I came here.”
  (KTV respondent)

- “I’m not sure, but didn’t have a choice. I don’t have the education to get another job.”
  (Freelance respondent)

- “I do not have an ID card.”
  (Freelance respondent)

A large majority of respondents, or 67% (33 people) of total respondents, reported entering into sex work after being introduced to it by their friends, with an additional 29%, (14 people) reported that they had brought themselves into the sex industry. A high
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prevalence of friend/self-introduction into the male sex industry has also been found in several other studies conducted throughout Cambodia, India and the Philippines (Miles & Blanch 2011; Davis & Miles, 2011; Miles, Thakur & KM Davis, 2013; Miles & Davis, 2013).

![Figure 3.1](image)

Among the 26 respondents from male massage establishments, 57% or 12 people reported to be Thai, while the majority of those in bar-based sex work, or 79% of group (or 11 people), were found to be of Burmese origin. The commercial male sex scene in Chiang Mai does not present the traditional images of trafficking that are so often perpetuated by media and other interest groups, because of the amount of agency that male sex workers have in entering into the industry. As Grieger found in his 2012 study of freelance sex workers in Chiang Mai, none of the respondents in the current study were explicitly forced into the sex industry by an individual or group. The high percentages of respondents reporting being introduced into the industry by a friend and those who report self-introduction into the industry supports this trend.
While there seems to be a certain amount of agency in entering the industry for those interviewed in this study, this does not rule out the existence of males who are directly forced into sex work in Chiang Mai. It is important to point out that the current study is limited only to those establishments that were willing to grant access to field researchers. The research team was denied access to 80% (four out of five) of show bars and was also denied access to many massage parlors. Of particular concern is the denial of access to the show bars, as the majority of boys working in this sector are of Burmese and Shan (Thai-Yai) origin, which other studies and the online Gay in Chiang Mai tourist guide points out (Guadamuz et al., 2010). This population is particularly at risk for exploitation due to refugee or illegal immigrant status. In the particular show bar the research team was granted access to one respondent who confidently informed the team of his ability to make more money than any of the other boys in the bar because he was Thai and not an ethnic minority.

Grieger’s 2012 study on freelance sex workers in Chiang Mai found that all respondents (n=12) had previously worked in jobs that did not involve sex work and entrance into the sex industry was largely based upon discrimination based on ethnic minority status, lack of formal Thai skills and lack of higher education. About 80% (39 people) of respondents in the current study reported receiving education of 9th grade or below, with roughly 40% (19 people) receiving only primary education or below. These statistics along with migration data above seem to support Grieger’s findings. Discrimination in various job sectors outside the sex industry are also backed by information received by our research team’s partner organization who conducts outreach to local sex establishments. Several respondents trying to find an alternative from the KTV sector reported not being able to find minimum wage jobs because of their lack of ID and ethnic status. Though employees of all establishments investigated in the current study seem to have ability to come and go freely, the lack of access to viable alternative employment
limits their exit from sex work. Respondents who reported entering the sex industry because it presented “easy work/schedule” (25%, or 13 people) also appears to mirror findings from Grieger’s 2012 study. Grieger’s respondents reported working long hours (92) and were sometimes even paid less than promised wages in jobs prior to entering the sex industry (2012: 94). Additionally, the discrimination and bullying that occurred in these jobs (2012: 92) is less or does not exist in the sex establishments where these boys can feel more “comfortable or accepted” (2012: 99). It should be no surprise that many respondents in the current study reported entering the sex industry because the work is “easy” and the schedule flexible.

![Figure 3.3: Respondents’ reported age of entry into the sex industry.](image)

Respondents were asked at what age they entered sex work, with 21.5% (11 people) reporting entering the industry below the age of 18 (15% of group or 4 people) of those working in male massage, 75% (6 people) of those working as freelancers, and 10% (1 person) of those working in the KTV bar). None of the respondents working in the show bar reported entering the industry below the age of 18. Ages of entrance into the industry ranged between 13 years and 27 years. Freelance sex workers appear to be the highest risk for engaging in sex work below the age of 18.

Within each sector, there are differing opinions on when boys enter into sex work. Overall, 33% of respondents (or 15 people) reported that boys enter sex work starting at an age below 18 years old. Within the freelance sector, 75% of respondents (or 6 people) reported that boys enter sex work under the age of 18. The freelance sector seems to have the highest prevalence of underage sex workers, which could largely be explained by the unorganized context in which the sex work is being performed (i.e. no direct employment from bars). Employment in entertainment establishments (massage parlors, KTV bars, show bars) requires an age of at least 18 years old, which is why there is perhaps such a discrepancy between opinions/observations of freelance workers and other entertainment workers. It is obvious from this data that many males are entering the sex industry in their young teens, despite data collected regarding the age of respondents. Only two respondents in the current study report being under the age of 18.
When asked why they believe this is the common entrance age for sex work, respondents (seven people) reported having seen this age group before in their sector of entertainment work. Only three respondents reported opinions that boys “should” enter the industry below the age of 18, with two out of the three giving contradictory answers when asked why they believe that. One respondent stated that 15 was an appropriate age for entry as the boy would be “teen-aged”, which may infer that younger entertainment workers are more desirable to potential clients.

**Modes of Payment**

Data seems to indicate a positive correlation between the frequency with which respondents meet their clients for sex and their reliance upon tips as their sole means of income. The majority of respondents, or 43% (or 22 people), indicated that tips are their sole means of income, and they received no form of regular wages. Twenty-nine percent (15 people) indicated that they receive a mixture of both wages and tips – the majority of this group came from respondents working in KTV bars. Though at the time of data collection these respondents reported receiving a salary, outreach efforts by Urban Light (the partnering organization in this study) have found that employees of the KTV bar are not currently being paid a salary, and employees are increasingly reliant upon tips as the sole source of income.

Figure 4.1 shows an apparent positive correlation between respondents reliance on tips as their sole source of income and their frequency of meeting clients for sex.
**Reliance Upon Tips Across Types of Entertainment Work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wage</th>
<th>Tips</th>
<th>Wage &amp; Tips</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Showbar</td>
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<td>71%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freelance-Bar</td>
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<td>25%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTV Bar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2

**Male Massage (n=26):** Modes of payment among male masseurs vary from establishment to establishment. In some establishments, masseurs are known to receive a small portion of the base fee that is paid to the establishment for the massage services; however, the majority of male masseurs (54%) reported that tips are their only form of income and that they receive no salary. Several of the massage establishments offer both erotic and traditional massages, and require minimum tips to masseurs depending on the massage given.

**Show bars (n=7):** While the number of respondents coming from show bars is small, it is notable that respondents working within show bars indicated the greatest reliance on tips among all other outlets of male entertainment work. A strong majority of this group, 71% (or five out of the seven respondents interviewed) indicated that their income is solely dependent upon the tips that they received from their clients and that they received no other form of regular salary.

It should also be noted that data collection from show bars presented field researchers with a particular challenge. In approaching show bar management, researchers would state that they were working alongside of an organization which provided health services and educational opportunities for young males working in this industry and management was informed that this was an exercise to gain a better understanding of the needs of such groups so as to provide them with better care and resources in the future. Only one out of the five establishments approached was willing to grant field researchers access to respondents. Because of this, the scope of understanding on the systems of pay within these establishments is limited.

Anecdotal conversation with management and staff within the show bar to which researchers were granted access indicated that male show bars within the Chiang Mai area are understood to be homogeneously staffed with groups coming from tribal or ethnic minority areas – different show bars were usually comprised of different tribal groups, and it is cited that it is uncommon for these groups to mix. Management within this establishment cited that this particular show bar was operated quite differently from other establishments of its kind and that researchers would not likely be granted access to other establishments in the area – an assertion which proved to be true.
While researchers were flatly turned down at other key show bars, the qualitative data described in Case Study 1 above provides insights into the young men’s reliance on tips in show bars.

**Freelancers working in bars (n=8):** Findings from field interviews, coupled with qualitative field data indicated that the majority of freelancers are not directly connected to the bars in which they work. Prices for sex work are typically negotiated on a client-by-client basis. Two respondents working as freelancers were actually employed by the bars in which they also provided sexual services, and provided sexual services within the establishment to supplement their income. In addition to providing sexual services, young men working in the freelance bars will give massages to clients for tips and will be given a small fee from the bar if a client buys him a drink. The current study’s youngest respondent (age 15) reported giving massages at the bar for tips as his primary source of income. Respondents in Grieger’s 2012 study also indicated receiving tips at the bar in exchange for touching clients and having drinks bought for them (2012: 29).

**KTV bars (n=10):** Respondents from KTV Bars reported that they were able to make a maximum guaranteed salary of 100 THB a day (3.25 USD), which would be equivalent to 3000 THB a month (90 USD) if they are able to work full-time. This is well below Thailand’s minimum wage salary of 300 THB a day (9 USD), which would be equivalent to 6000-7000 THB (180-210 USD) a month for full-time work. This pay is only possible for a 30-day work month and long working hours (9PM-6AM) make working everyday exhaustive. Though well below the Thai minimum wage of 300 THB a day, this base pay encouraged regular work attendance. In addition, employees are fined 5 THB for every minute after 9PM that they show up (this 5 baht is subtracted from the base 100 THB pay). This fine system insures that boys show up on time; however, there is no requirement for them to show up everyday. Since completing data collection, follow-up with respondents working within in KTV bars have reported having not been paid the base salary for the past two months (at the time the follow up was done). Because of the lack of pay, several young men have quit working at the bar. Bar ownership has been actively recruiting boys to fill these newly vacated positions, promising the base pay of 100 THB a day, yet reportedly continues to forgo paying anyone. Tips are stated to have been the only source of income, though many respondents continue working at this KTV, as quitting would leave them jobless. Respondents who have quit have reported difficulty in finding alternative employment that would pay comparably (even without the base salary). Reasons cited include lack of higher education and their ethnic minority statuses. This labor exploitation within the KTV bar has increased pressure for employees to engage in sex work to earn tips.
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**Relationships**

**Disclosure/Non-disclosure of work:** While no significant differences were noted in rates of disclosure of work between respondents coming from massage establishments and bar-based entertainment establishments, some significant patterns were noted between migrant and non-migrant respondents. Respondents migrating from Burma were found to be significantly less likely to have disclosed their work to their families compared to those who reported having been born in Thailand. Among the 21 people reporting to have been born in Thailand, 52% report that their families were unaware of the nature of their work in Chiang Mai, while 79% of those reporting to have been born in Burma (n=14) state that their families were unaware of the nature of their work. Both migrant and non-migrant respondents indicated fears and/or apprehensions about disclosing their work to family members, some indicated lying or telling half-truths to parents, indicating that their parents would be hurt or worried if they knew the nature of their work. This non-disclosure should be understood in view of the fact that the majority of respondents are also financially supporting their families with their income from entertainment/sex work. Very similar patterns of disclosure/ non-disclosure were found among respondents in our previous studies among male masseurs in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and Metro-Manila, Philippines with numerous respondents indicating non-disclosure due to shame or fears of discrimination.

![Table](attachment:image.png)

**Figure 5.1**

No significant difference was noted between migrants and non-migrants regarding the disclosure of their work to housemates. Slightly more than one-third of both groups indicated that their housemates were aware of the nature of their work. Lastly, among respondents who indicated having a partner, one-in-five (20%) cited that their partners were not aware of the nature of their work. Some differences were noted between migrants and non-migrants regarding their disclosure of their work to intimate partners. While only 73% of respondents born in Thailand cited that their partner is aware of their work, all non-Thai respondents cited that their partner is aware of their work. More research is needed to help understand the dynamics of intimate, personal relationships and the social development of migrant groups in the sex industry; however, a larger sampling is needed to complete such an endeavor.

**Feelings about work:** The most common overall negative emotions associated with respondents’ work were feelings of shame (reported by 49%), low self-esteem (reported by 37%) and feelings of guilt (reported by 32%). Notable differences are seen in personal feelings among those working in male massage establishments and those working in bar-based establishments. Respondents coming from bar-based establishments were twice as likely to report feelings of shame associated with their work and 68%
more likely to report having feelings of low self-esteem associated with their work compared with those working in male massage establishments. On the other hand, those working in massage establishments were 50% more likely to report feelings of guilt and 36% more likely to report feelings of self-blame associated with their work compared with those working in bar-based establishments. Also, those working within massage establishments were the only group to report feeling that they were deserving of punishment. It is notable that respondents coming from male massage establishments indicated higher instances of judicial or legally-based negative emotions (guilt, self-blame, and being deserving of punishment), while those coming from bar-based establishments indicated a greater prevalence of internal, self-conceptual negative emotions (shame and low self-esteem). While these apparent patterns may pique interests, more analysis on a larger sampling of respondents and a more complete triangulation of surrounding qualitative data is needed to provide a better understanding of these apparent patterns.
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**Figure 5.2:** Comparison of bar and massage based respondents’ personal feelings regarding work.

**Stigma and/or Discrimination:** In comparing respondents from bar-based establishments with those working in male massage establishments, there seems to be very few differences in terms of reported experiences of stigma or discrimination due to their work, with about 42-46% of each group reporting to receive stigma and/or discrimination on the basis of their work in the entertainment industry. However, in breaking up the category of "bar-based entertainment workers" and comparing each outlet of male entertainment work individually, some significant differences can be noted. While 42% of respondents from male massage establishments (n=26), 38% of those of freelancers working within bars (n=8), and 30% of those coming from KTV bars (n=30) report experiences of stigma or discrimination due to their work, a strong majority, or 71% of respondents coming from show bars report experiences of stigma or discrimination due to their work.
Sexual Health

Overall, respondents reported and demonstrated having received sexual education and were aware of the risks of unprotected sex. Freelance sex workers in the current study were more likely to engage in unprotected sex; respondents in this group were the only individuals who reported not using a condom and having intercourse with at least one client in the past week. With these limited insights into the sexual practices throughout each sector of the male sex industry, freelancers seem to be the most at-risk group. Higher pay is indeed given for unprotected sex, as was explained to researchers, and the generally younger ages of respondents in the freelance sector makes these results even more compelling.

Figure 6.1

The knowledge of HIV transmission and sexual health in general highlights the success of current outreach efforts of government agencies and NGOs working in Chiang Mai’s red light areas. Eighty six percent of respondents mention sex as the main transmission method of HIV, with 35% specifically mentioning “unprotected sex.” Transmission through needles and blood was mentioned by an additional 6% and 12%, respectively. Nearly 80% of respondents reported receiving some form of sex education with 86% reporting having received sexual health services.
Forty-seven percent of respondents (or 23 people) reported having been tested at least once for HIV in the past six months, with a majority of respondents (53% or 26 people) reported not being tested at all during the same time period. Those working in male massage had the highest rates of testing, at least once in the past six months (62.5% or 15 people), while 25% of freelance sex workers (two people) and only 14% of show bar respondents (one person) report any HIV testing during the same time period.

Roughly 8% of respondents reported rashes, ulcerations, or lumps on the genital area in the past six months, and an additional 6% of respondents (three people) reported urethral discharge, difficulty passing urine, and/or pain in the testicles in the past six months. No respondents reported knowledge of a positive HIV diagnosis; however, following data collection, the research team was informed that one respondent working as a freelancer within bars has a confirmed diagnosis. At age 33, this respondent has been working in the freelance bars for over 15 years, with sex work as his primary source of income during this time period and continues to be so even following the diagnosis. This particular case highlights the health risks individuals take when buying and selling sex. The current study’s data indicates the highest risks of HIV transmission to be in the freelance bars because of inconsistent condom usage, and these risks are even further compounded when an individual who knowingly has HIV continues to engage in sex work.

Following his diagnosis, this individual was connected to a variety of NGOs that are helping him secure medication and care for the remainder of his life. He currently lacks a government ID card, and as Liz Cameron of the Open Society Institute points out, “[d]ue to [individual’s] lack of full citizenship or inadequate documentation, many ethnic minorities in Thailand, refugees, and migrant workers are not covered by the Universal Healthcare scheme.” Thailand’s “30 baht scheme” (health care and treatment of any disease for 30 baht), is a promising government program; however, individuals lacking a
Thai ID are not eligible to utilize these health services (21). Other barriers such as inability to speak Thai, and geographic isolation also lowers utilization of the program by ethnic minority groups (Isarabhakdi, 2004; Hu & Chai, 2008). Additionally, the urbanization of ethnic minority populations that make up a majority of male sex workers in Chiang Mai (BonTong, Nov 14 2011) further complicates access to healthcare as services are only provided in the province from which an individual comes. All but three respondents in the current study are migrants to Chiang Mai which presents challenges in providing accessible and quality healthcare to this vulnerable population. Once an individual receives an ID card (which the particular respondent diagnosed with HIV will have following a 15,000 Baht payment ~$500 US), access to healthcare is granted. This respondent will begin receiving anti-retrovirals and other medications once this often lengthy and complex process is complete.

Substance Abuse

Respondents working in bar-based sex work are far more likely to use alcohol “moderately” or “very much” (92% or 23 people) than those working in male massage (43% or 11 people). The most common reasons for alcohol use were “for fun”, mentioned by 45% of respondents and “client entertainment”, mentioned by 31% of respondents. Another 22.4% stated that they drink to relieve stress and one respondent reported that he was an alcoholic. Male massage was the only sector in which any respondents (two people) were found to not use alcohol at all.

Illegal drug use was largely unreported among respondents, with only 12% (6 people) disclosing the use of illegal drugs in the past, specifically naming “yaba” (methamphetamine tablets), “ice” (Crystal Methamphetamines), cocaine, heroin, and marijuana as drugs used in the previous three months.
Alcohol use during Intercourse with Clients: Alcohol use when having sex with clients is far more prevalent in the bar-based sectors than in male massage. Four male massage respondents and twenty bar-based sex workers reported alcohol use during sex with clients. Availability of alcohol and the expectation to entertain clients is the primary reason for the higher prevalence of alcohol use at the bars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar Based</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7.2: Frequency of using alcohol when meeting clients for sex.

Though alcohol use during intercourse with clients is far less prevalent in massage establishments, performance-enhancing drug (PED) is more common. Sixty-one percent of male masseurs (14 people) report using PEDs during intercourse with clients, while 42% of bar-based sex workers reporting any PED use.

Figure 7.3: Frequency of using performance-enhancing drugs during sex with clients.

Show Bar Case 1 above provides some insight into the inner workings of show bars the research team did not have access to during data collection. The individual reported that he had to use PEDs in order to have sex with multiple clients in one night. High pressure to make money through tips and sex work increased the need for PED use. Show bar respondents, not surprisingly, showed the second highest prevalence of PED use during intercourse with clients.
Recommendations

General Recommendations
This study represents the “tip of an iceberg” in regards to the understanding of male vulnerability and sexual exploitation in northern Thailand. Developing a deeper understanding of the depth and pervasiveness of this issue largely depends on the commitment of governmental authorities, NGOs and donors, and their willingness to acknowledge that male sexual exploitation does exist within the present entertainment industry, that it is an issue, and that its prevalence may be much larger than what is assumed.

Particular focus is needed on providing health services to migrant workers – especially among males working within bars as freelance sex workers. NGOs and social service organizations should work with the Thai government to aid in the process of migrant workers receiving proper Government identification, and ensuring access to healthcare and sexual health services. Overall, respondents indicated relatively high levels of awareness of sexual health issues, and reported fairly consistent usage of condoms within all sectors of male entertainment work, except among respondents working as freelancers within bars.

While continued advocacy on sexual health issues is important, it is also important that government bodies and social service organizations are aware of the holistic needs that are present among male entertainment workers that go beyond solely providing sexual health education, condoms and STI checks. Education services should specifically focus on the development of young males as whole persons, providing them with emotional health, life skills, vocational skills development, and legal help alongside of necessary sexual health services. In addition, there is a need for both government and nongovernment organizations to take on and train young males coming from challenging social backgrounds, providing opportunities for finishing basic education and offering vocational training to young males who desire an alternative to sex work.

There is a need for the development of expanded outreach efforts to hill tribe areas that attempt to address some of the systemic “push factors” that drive young males into sexually exploitive careers, teaching the dangers of sex work and advocating for vocations that uphold the dignity of the individuals involved. It is important for NGOs to advocate the benefits of education and the development of practical vocational skills. In
addition, there is a need for expanded aid to obtain appropriate government identification and citizenship so as to be able to participate in proper health services, have access to education, and to have a wider range of employment options. Additionally, the development of scholarship programs to keep students in school, especially high school, to help alleviate pressures of extra costs associated with attending high school (transportation, school meals, books, uniform, etc.) would be greatly beneficial for at-risk youth.

The authors of this study believe that much, if not all of the sex work we have observed, is exploitive, but until the Royal Thai Government radically change policies to prosecute clients of sex workers then we request that the Royal Thai Government demand greater transparency from entertainment venues and hold such establishments accountable for the fair treatment of those working within their ranks. Social service organizations should work to educate law-enforcement officials in northern Thailand to understand the systemic needs and vulnerabilities of tribal and other migrant groups and provide training for officials on how to treat such groups with dignity and respect. Meanwhile, social service organizations should work with NGOs to lobby for the development of socially responsible businesses to provide such youth with viable employment alternatives to sex work.

It is also important that present advocates for child development work dispel the common belief that boys and young men are independent agents lacking the significant vulnerabilities that females are widely accepted to have. It is important that young males are incorporated into the language of vulnerability so as to normalize the understanding that exploitation of violence is a human issue – not merely an issue that affects females.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The present study offers only an initial look at the visible surface of male entertainment work in Chiang Mai. Additional baseline research is necessary to understand the wider spectrum of sexually exploited males, including those groups that are not readily accessible. Anecdotal information suggests that networks of young males are available on the streets and in brothels in the Chiang Mai area. Future studies should work to partner with the social service sector to understand the needs and experiences of male survivors (particularly young boys) to inform anti-trafficking in persons and anti-sexual exploitation efforts towards these groups, as well as an analysis of the demand for males among both foreign and Thai clients.
Deeper, qualitative research is needed to build on this initial baseline study in order to bring a better understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of sexually exploited males in Chiang Mai. In particular, qualitative work investigating family backgrounds and the various "push factors" that lead such groups into sexually exploitive fields of work would be greatly useful. It would also be beneficial to conduct research that aims to develop a deeper understanding of "positive deviance", looking at young males who do not enter into the sex industry—even when their peers do—and the various factors that may prevent them from beginning such work.

In addition, this research suggests significant levels of inter-country trafficking/migration of males for sex work in Chiang Mai. Additional baseline research may be useful, which specifically looks at male groups in order to better understand their needs, vulnerabilities, and identify trafficking sources and routes for males into the Chiang Mai area.

This study revealed that a significant majority of male entertainment workers have come from various hill tribes in northern Thailand. Qualitative research looking at marginalization, discrimination, and surrounding ethnic issues of various tribal groups working in the sex industry in Chiang Mai would be helpful as a complement to Grieger’s 2012 study.

**Conclusion**

This study attempts to provide a brief view of the often overlooked needs and vulnerabilities of males working in sexually exploitive careers in Chiang Mai in order to help develop a greater understanding of such groups. Our team hopes this study acts as an impetus for expanded work with such groups and advocacy on their vulnerabilities, as there is still much to be understood regarding these issues in Thailand. Data collected from this study, coupled with the current, limited body of literature on male exploitation in Thailand, underscores the reality that more attention needs to be paid to this population of people. Current Thai social structures, including its highly patriarchal foundations and marginalization of ethnic minorities, perpetuate these vulnerabilities. With further understanding of the issues that young male sex workers experience, government policy and the NGO can potentially have great success in breaking the cycle of poverty and exploitation, which often includes male entertainment work and other sexually exploitive careers.

In the current donor climate, there is a great difficulty to find funding for boys projects and research looking at the needs of males. Much of this is due to the lack of aware-
ness that males are vulnerable to exploitation and are not innately strong and agents of their own destinies as many social and cultural beliefs may assume. It is vital that churches, NGOs and government groups adopt a holistic and balanced understanding of human vulnerability. Rather than approaching issues of human trafficking and sexual exploitation from a gender-based perspective, it may be more helpful to approach such subjects as a human issue, encompassing males, females and even the variety of identities in between. It is important that we understand males and females as human beings with hopes, desires, vulnerabilities and needs that require a thorough understanding in order to serve them appropriately, meeting their actual needs, rather than addressing the needs these groups are perceived to have. Such an understanding comes only through careful research and advocacy.
Bibliographical Resources


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Contact Information

Urban Light:

Dao Phimphisa Chailoet, Thailand Director, Urban Light
Chiang Mai, Thailand
Email: dao@urban-light.org
Website: www.urban-light.org

Alexandra Russell, Founder, Urban Light
Email: alexandra@urban-light.org
Website: www.urban-light.org

Love146:

Jarrett Davis, M.A., Social Researcher, Love146.
Ohio, USA / Phnom Penh, Cambodia / Metro Manila, Philippines.
Email: jarrett@love146.org.

Glenn Miles, Ph.D., Asia Community Building Facilitator, Love146.
P.O. Box 2654, Phnom Penh 3, Kingdom of Cambodia.
Email: glenn@love146.org.

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