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Listening to Local and Foreign Sex Buyers of Men and Women in Cambodia

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Abstract

Research on prostitution and trafficking has largely focused on the exploitation of girls and young women. This research comes out of the “Listening to the Demand” two-part study by an independent research team on the sex industry in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. “Listening to the Demand” is a series of research exploring often over-looked populations in the anti-trafficking conversation, including men and transgender people. The first of the studies was completed in 2013 and focuses on men who purchased sex with female sex workers. Interviews of 50 Cambodian and 50 foreign heterosexual and bisexual males explored the respondents’ views and use of prostituted women in Southeast Asia’s sex industry. The second part of the research was completed in 2014 and focuses on men who purchase sex with men. In this second part of the project, 51 Cambodian and 23 foreign men who have sex with men were interviewed about their views of prostitution, the individual sex worker, and their experiences of Cambodia’s sex industry. Due to its comparative nature, the research seeks to deliver information on the differences in culture between the foreign and Cambodian men who seek to pay for sexual services. Results point to the need for proper sex and gender education as well as different approaches when planning projects to reach out to men purchasing sex. In gaining a deeper knowledge of the beliefs and behaviours among the demand population, the findings suggest more holistic approaches are needed to combat the exploitation of sexual services in Cambodia.

Introduction

This research comes out of the “Listening to the Demand” two-part study done on the sex industry in Cambodia and is designed to more fully understand the motivations, attitudes, and behaviour of men who purchase sex with female sex workers (MSFSW) and men who purchase sex with male sex workers (MSMSW) in Cambodia. A large number of organizations seek to address sexual exploitation by focusing on the survivors. Very few organizations are doing anything to address the demand. The majority of sexual exploitation that occurs in Cambodia is by Cambodian¹ men, although the number of tourists and expatriates in Cambodia is increasing and so the number of foreign men who frequent the red light areas is also increasing.

This paper addresses the specific problem of lack of awareness of the demand segment of the sex industry in Cambodia. Research on prostitution has largely focused on the exploitation of girls and young women, whereas the research extending to men as victims involved in the sex industry has almost exclusively focused on men as victims of HIV/AIDS and STI transmission. As a result, there is a considerable information gap on the male segment of the sex industry and relatively scant research that will assist prevention of exploitation in this area.

Literature Review

The Sex Industry in Southeast Asia

In order to understand the topic of MSFSW and MSMSW in Cambodia, the culture and history of the region must be understood. Pre-Khmer Rouge there is only anecdotal evidence prostitution existed. Survival sex was prevalent in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975-1979, as overt prostitution was strictly controlled and, to a lesser extent, during the Vietnamese occupation in the 1980s.² There is little research on the demand for paid sex within Cambodia under the Vietnamese, but demand boomed with the arrival of 20,000 United Nations peacekeepers during the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1991.³ Upon UNTAC departure in 1993, the number of

¹ The terms Cambodian and Khmer will be used interchangeably throughout this article.

² Melissa Farley et al, *A Thorn in the Heart: Cambodian Men who Buy Sex* (July 2012): 12, <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com>.

³ Ibid.

women in prostitution initially dropped before rising again to previous levels; this could show an increase in local demand. It is, however, unknown how many men were working in the sex entertainment industry at that time.⁴ In 1997, in an effort to tackle the sex industry, the Prime Minister of Cambodia, Hun Sen, attempted to close down all the brothels in his country.⁵ This was not effective as prostitution moved to “...night clubs, snooker clubs, massage salons, karaoke parlours, barber shops, hidden brothels and on the street...”⁶ As a result, there are still significant numbers of people involved in the sex industry in Cambodia.

Male Prostitution and Vulnerability of Males.

Research carried out by Alastair Hilton in 2008 explored vulnerability factors of young Cambodian male victims relating to sexual abuse and exploitation.⁷ It was found that knowledge of a boy as victim of sexual abuse often led to discrimination from the community; this discrimination may also stem from the fact that sexually abused boys “are often not viewed as victims but as consenting.”⁸ Another factor that heightens the vulnerability of men and boys to sexual exploitation is the cultural perception that male populations cannot be sexually exploited and/or this is not socially recognized problem. On a global scale, bodies responsible for public services, legislation, mass media, and scholarly material, overlook male sex workers.⁹ The silence on male sexual exploitation can be dangerous for boys and men around the world when in fact a large proportion of the world’s sex industries are comprised of males.

Men who Purchase Sex in Cambodia

In Cambodia many men tend to believe that having more than one sexual partner as well as many sexual experiences are part of being a man. This comes from an idea of masculinity, which involves a commitment to the group; according to most men, masculinity involves socializing, drinking, and seeking prostitutes.¹⁰

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Daphne Meeks and Glenn Miles, *Hard on the Heart*. (Phnom Penh: Love 146, 2013).

⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷ Alastair Hilton, *I Thought It Could Never Happen to Boys: Sexual abuse and exploitation of boys in Cambodia*. (First Step Cambodia, 2008).

⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁹ Please refer to the references for a study entitled, *Women are Victims: Men Make Choices*, which researched the invisibility of boys and men in scholarly discussions of the global sex trade (Jeffery Dennis, 2008).

¹⁰ Reid Smith, *Let’s Go for a Walk: Sexual Decision-making among Clients of Female Entertainment Service Workers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia*. (Population Services International & Family Health Services International, 2007).

There have been two recent papers written using interviews with men who buy sex from female sex workers in Cambodia. In 2012, Melissa Farley published research on the MSFSW demand in Cambodia called *A Thorn in the Heart*. This study looked at the reasons Khmer men purchase sex. One of her findings was that most Khmer men dehumanized the women in prostitution. They believed that the women in prostitution were intrinsically different from other women; they were described as “...shameless, flirtatious, too direct, too sexual, vulgar, and emotionally detached.”¹¹ Compared to non-prostitute Khmer women who are, “...shy, with downcast eyes, sexually unresponsive, and subordinate to men.”¹² Eighty-three percent of the men who paid for sex with women in Farley’s study had wives or girlfriends, and the most common reason why Khmer men paid for sex was “in order to satisfy an immediate sexual urge.”¹³

The idea of paying for sex as part of heterosexual male bonding is also mentioned in a study on the Cambodian sex industry. This study mentions how Khmer men go out and drink together with friends, money is pooled, and there is peer pressure to go and have sex.¹⁴ In other research on men who buy sex in Cambodia, ninety percent of the participants considered paying for sex to be normal.¹⁵

In 2009, a book written by someone who actively participated in the Cambodian sex industry as a client was published under the pseudonym, Randy Nightwalker. In his book, *Addicted to Love*, he shared his experiences about the women he paid for sex and appears to encourage foreign men who are looking to pay for sex in Cambodia to do so.¹⁶ He speaks about how he has “...gotten over the moral revulsion...” and now freely enjoys paying for sex with Cambodian women.¹⁷

Sexual Orientation, Identity and Expression

An understanding of the distinction between sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and biological sex, as well as the divergence between Eastern and Western perceptions of these aspects of gender/sexuality is crucial to

¹¹ Farley, *A Thorn in the Heart*, 19.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Smith, *Let's Go for a Walk*.

¹⁵ Farley, *A Thorn in the Heart*, 19.

¹⁶ Randy Nightwalker, *Addicted to Love. Exploring the Nightlife in Cambodia*. (Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2009).

¹⁷ Ibid.,17.

the study of paid sex in Cambodia. The Western gay/straight binary is not applicable in Cambodia, and if Westerners enter with this preconceived notion it will limit their understanding of the host culture.

In the West, sexual orientation and gender identity are predominately divided into four main categories: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual and transgender. Although identity is a multifaceted concept, the two Western categories of identity that are relevant to the present study are gender identity and sexual identity, which is linked to orientation.¹⁸ There is a more fluid diversity of expressions of male-to-male sexuality in Southeast Asia. Khmer men do not fit the same orientation paradigms in place in the West. In Cambodia, as in other Southeast Asian countries, sexual identity is not linked to orientation or a self-sense of gender, but is rather based on personal characteristics. Due to personal characteristics, Cambodian men may not consider themselves as homosexual or bisexual even if they are having sex with men.¹⁹ The implication of this reality for research is that there is often a “mismatch” between respondents’ sexual self-identification and sexual behaviour they report.²⁰

The remaining sections of the paper will outline the research methodology of the MSFSW and MSMSW studies. The results will then be presented and a discussion of those results will follow. Finally, a conclusion will be presented as well as recommendations for future research.

Methodology

MSFSW Study

Four researchers and five volunteer translators surveyed 50 Khmer men and 50 foreign men in Phnom Penh from September to November of 2013 for the MSFSW study. The Khmer men who were approached held a variety of different jobs, from moto taxi and tuk-tuk²¹ drivers to students and businessmen. The majority of the men were found in public areas. The foreigners ranged from short-term tourists to long-term expatriates. The foreign men were approached by a combination of four English-speaking interviewers in teams of two. The

¹⁸ Laura Reiter, “Sexual Orientation, Sexual Identity, and the Question of Choice,” *Clinical Social Work Journal* 17, no. 2 (1989): 138-150.

¹⁹ The Cambodian Center for Human Rights, *Coming out in the Kingdom: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in Cambodia* (2010): 11.

²⁰ Philippe Girault et al. “HIV, STIs, and Sexual Behaviors Among Men Who Have Sex with Men in Phnom Penh, Cambodia,” *AIDS Education and Prevention* 16, no. 1 (2004): 35.

²¹ A tuk-tuk is a common form of public transportation made up of a motorbike with a carriage for up to four passengers.

Cambodian respondents were approached by one of five volunteer translators and an English-speaking researcher. The interviews of Cambodians were conducted in the Khmer language.

The researchers adhered to the *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on the Perpetuation of Sexual Violence* presented by the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) out of South Africa in 2008. Within this document it is recommended: that the survey must keep the respondents' identity anonymous, avoid the disclosure of incriminating details from the respondents, and that the respondents had the right to not answer a question or discontinue the interview if desired.²²

Limitations in this study included cross-cultural translation challenges. The foreigners were all interviewed in English, but for many respondents, English was their second or third language. There was also a problem of access. The interviews were initially carried out in strictly "red light" districts at night because of the target group. Researchers quickly realized interviewing at this time was not feasible because the men were in the area for a specific reason and were not interested in taking part in a lengthy survey. The interview times were adjusted to the afternoon where more men were sitting alone and willing to engage in conversation. A similar problem occurred with the Cambodian men. At first, known red light areas were targeted, with the aim of interviewing men outside at night. This approach was ineffective because many Khmer men like to go out at night with a large group of friends, making it difficult to address an individual. Therefore, the focus was shifted to highly frequented areas during the day, including cafés and markets. The wealthy and the poorest economic class of Cambodians were not available to be surveyed due to their work schedules and location. Similarly, it was impossible to get representative sample of foreign men due to all the different countries represented in Cambodia.

MSMSW Study

The researchers interviewed 51 Khmer and 23 foreign men from February to April of 2014 in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, and one foreign man was interviewed in Battambang via telephone. The MSMSW study was conducted with the assistance of four researchers and translators who approached the men in teams of two. Foreign men were approached at bars frequented by the MSMSW community. With the help of translators, interviews could be conducted in French, English, Italian, and Spanish. The Khmer respondents were interviewed in the Khmer language through Cambodian translators.

²² Jewkes R, Dartnall E and Sikweyiya Y. (2012). *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Perpetration of Sexual Violence*. Sexual Violence Research Initiative, Medical Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa

Participants were contacted and recruited through men's health clinics and bars. The foreign men interviewed fit three molds: they spoke English, French, Italian or Spanish; they were wealthy enough to travel to Cambodia; and they were willing to be interviewed. Contact with the Khmer MSMSW was made through collaboration with various men's sexual health clinics in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Due to accessibility issues, the research focused on lower and middle class urban Khmer men. The wealthy and the poorest economic classes of Cambodian population could not be surveyed due to their work schedules, location, and/or privacy surrounding their sexuality. As in the MSFSW study, the researchers adhered to the *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on the Perpetuation of Sexual Violence* presented by the SVRI out of South Africa in 2008.

The foremost limitation in the research was the number of foreign respondents willing to participate in the study. The foreign MSMSW community in Cambodia is small and many within the community know each other well. Some foreign men were under the impression the study intended to demonize the gay community. The preliminary reaction to the research was due to the history of discrimination this community has faced. The researchers had a small dialogue with the individuals clarifying the needs and goals of the present study and some agreed to participate. In addition, some Khmer respondents may not have been fully accurate in their accounts due to the cultural value of saving face. This is a deeply rooted cultural paradigm in Cambodia, and the researchers and translators tried to overcome this limitation by making the respondents feel as safe and comfortable as possible during the interview.

Results of the MSFSW Study

Demographics

The ages of the men interviewed for the MSFSW study were fairly evenly spread out. Eighteen of the respondents were 18-23 years old, seven of the men in this age group were foreigners and 11 of the men were Khmer. There were 19 men interviewed who were 24-29. Nine of the men were foreigners and 10 were Khmer. The highest percentage of the men fell into the age group of 30-39. Eight of these men were foreigners and 17 were Khmer. Eighteen men interviewed were of the ages 40-49, eight of them were foreigners and 10 were Khmer. Ten men were 50-59, with one man a foreigner and the rest Khmer. Eight of the respondents were 60-69 and all of them were Khmer. Finally, only two men were interviewed that were above the age of 70, one of the men was a foreigner and the other was a Khmer man.

All of the Khmer men (50/50) interviewed were originally from Cambodia. Among the foreign population, the respondents were mainly from Western countries, with a few men from the Middle East and South Africa. The largest percentage of foreigners interviewed was from Europe (25/50). Australians and New Zealanders were the second largest group of foreign respondents (13/50). The respondents who answered they were from the United States of America or Canada were placed into the North America category (9/50). The smallest category was from the Middle East (2/50) and one of the 50 men interviewed was from South Africa.

The largest percentage of the Khmer interviewed (29/50) were part of the private sector for their career, and the majority of the men were moto taxi and tuk-tuk drivers. The second largest category of the Khmer respondents was students (12/24). The third largest category worked in public sector jobs (5/50). The largest percentage of the foreign respondents worked in the private sector (23/49). The second largest job category for the foreign respondents was retired (9/50). There were 8/49 foreign men working in education either in Cambodia or in their home country. The number of foreign respondents who worked in NGOs or in the public sector was equal, 4/49.

The majority of all the men interviewed were single (44/100) followed by married men in second (37/100). Twenty-seven of the 37 men interviewed who were married were Khmer. Nine of the 11 men divorced were foreigners. Many Cambodian men were married and few were divorced.

View of Women

The participants were asked for their general view of women and out of 99 respondents 52/99 (52%) answered they have a positive view of women, 9/99 (9%) a negative view and 38/99 (38%) a neutral view of women. The Khmer respondents made up the majority of those who answered neutral, 27/49 (55%) and the foreigners made up the majority of those having a positive view of women, 35/50 (70%).

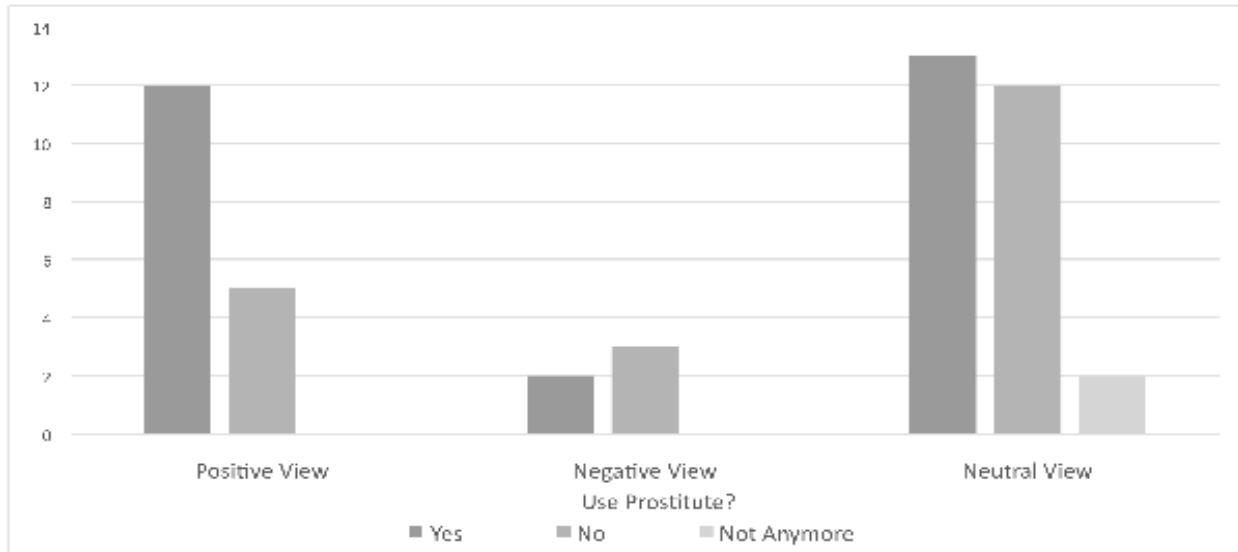


Figure 1: Khmer General View of Women

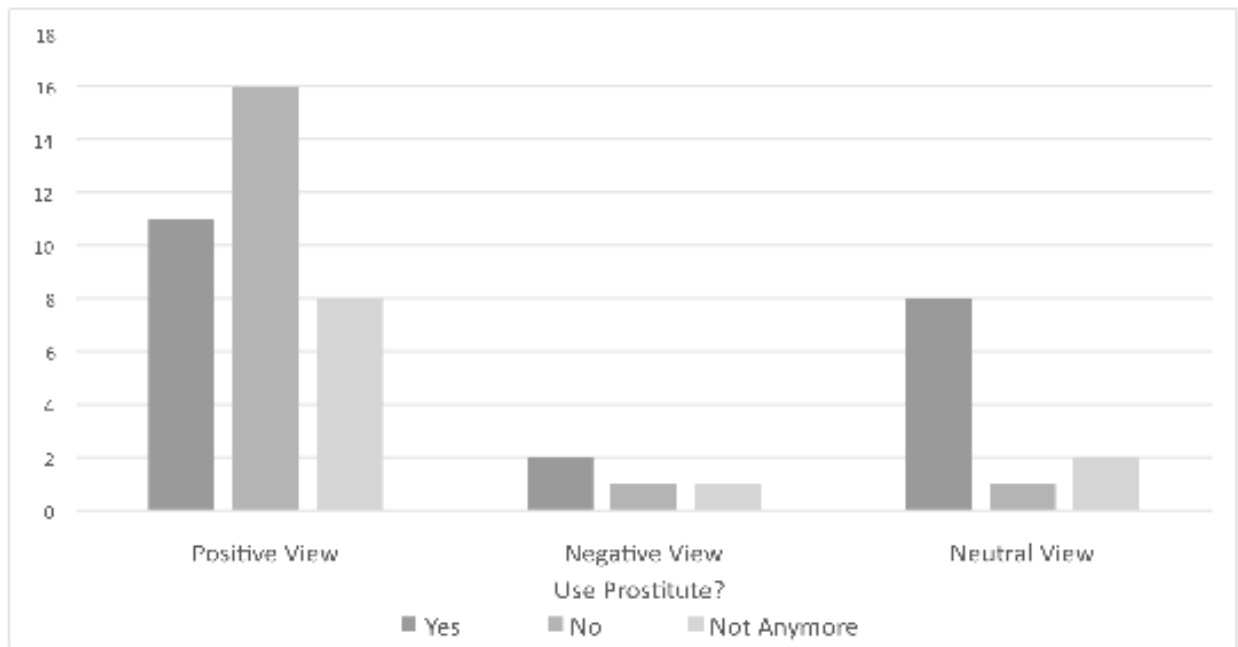


Figure 2: Foreigner General View of Women

View On and Use of Prostitutes

The participants were asked about their general view on prostitution. Seventeen out of ninety-nine (17%) answered that they had a positive view

towards prostitution, 27/99 (27%) had a negative view of prostitution, and the majority, 55/99 (55%), answered they had a neutral view of prostitution. The second largest majority of the foreigners, 12/50 (24%) said they had a positive view of prostitution and the second largest majority of the Khmer, 18/49 (37%), said they had a negative view. Furthermore, the men were asked why they had a positive, negative, or neutral view of prostitution. This was an open-ended question to give the men the chance to explain in their own words. A common answer of foreign men with a positive view on prostitution is that these ‘girls’, referring to young women working as sex workers in Southeast Asia, have no other choice of earning money to support their families and so it is seen as “a good way”, sometimes seen as even “the only way”, for them to earn money. Another reason given by foreign men for having a positive view of prostitution was that in their opinion there would be many more rape cases without prostitution. For Khmer men a main reason for a positive view was that prostitution is seen as a good way to relieve sexual tension.

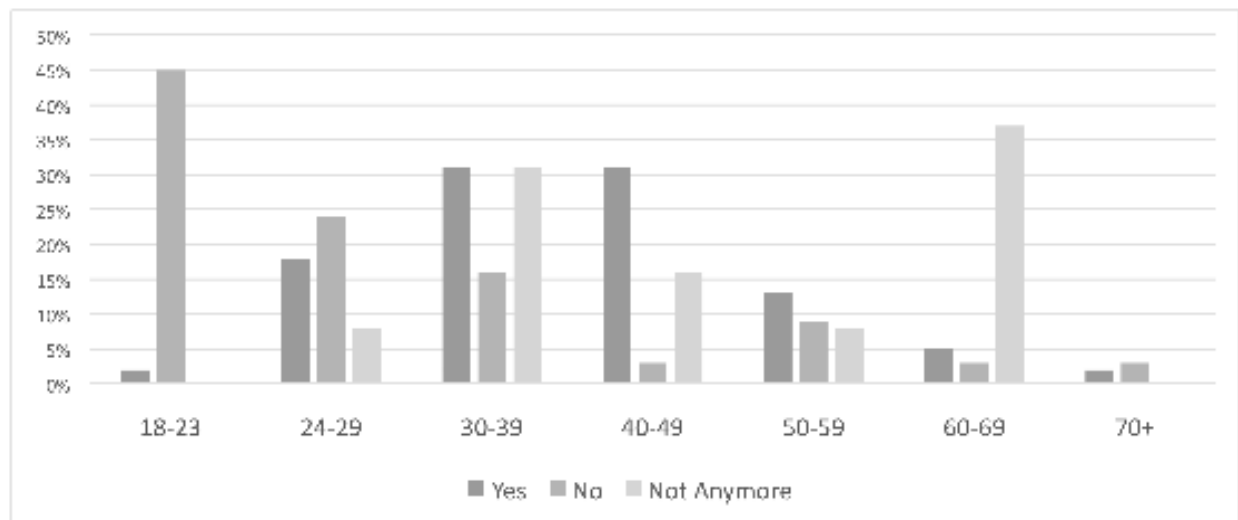


Figure 3: Prostitution Use by Age

For the respondents who admitted to currently using the services of prostitutes and those who had in the past, 49 respondents (28 Khmer and 21 foreign) were currently using prostitutes. Thirteen respondents (two Khmer and 11 foreign) were not using the services anymore but had used them in the past. Out of 49 responses from both Khmer and foreign men, the majority, 26/49 (53%), paid for sex with 50 or more prostitutes in their lives. The second largest majority, 13/49 (27%), paid for sex with between one and five prostitutes.

The men were asked how old they were when they first used the service of a prostitute. Out of 57 respondents, the largest age group was 18-21 years old, with 15/57 (26%). The second largest age group was 22-25, with 14/57 (25%), and the third largest was 26-29, 10/57 (18%). The Khmer responses had a clear bell curve starting from 16 up until 35 years of age, with the majority in the age group 18-21. In comparison, the foreign responses were distributed fairly evenly among every age group. Out of the 31 Khmer responses, everyone who had used prostitutes had used the services for the first time before the age of 36. Two foreign respondents had sex with a prostitute by the age of 13-15 years.

View of Pornography and Influence on Prostitution Habits

More Cambodians, 42/50 (84%), admitted to viewing pornography compared to 29/49 (59%) foreigners. Of the 84% of Cambodians who viewed pornography, 24/50 (48%) paid for sex, 16/50 (32%) had not paid for sex, and 2/50 (4%) had stopped paying for sex. Of the 59% of foreigners who viewed pornography, 12/49 (24.5%) paid for sex, 12/49 (24.5%) had not paid for sex, and 5/49 (10.2%) had stopped paying for sex. With the Cambodians, a higher percent that viewed pornography also had sex with prostitutes (48%).

Of the Cambodian men who were interviewed, 8/50 (16%) answered that pornography is positive, 22/50 (44%) said negative, and 20/50 (40%) said neutral. Among the foreign men, 9/50 (18%) said positive, 10/50 (20%) said negative, and 31/50 (62%) said neutral. More Cambodian men viewed pornography in a negative light compared with foreigners. A common response for Khmer respondents who said that pornography did influence their prostitution habits was that pornography was a sort of educator for the men, and they would like to experience the various techniques they saw in pornography with a prostitute.

Khmer			Foreigner		
Positive	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Neutral
19%	38.10%	42.90%	24.10%	6.90%	69.00%

Table 1: General View Toward Pornography

Researchers asked the men if pornography influenced their prostitution habits. The majority of Cambodians, 18/34 (52.9%), stated that pornography had

influenced their prostitution habits. Over a third of foreigners, 9/26 (37.5%) stated that pornography had influenced their prostitution habits.

Results of the MSMSW Study

Demographics

Consistent with the demography of Cambodia's population, the Khmer men interviewed were largely younger. All were under the age of 50, with 24 men being between the ages of 20-29. The foreign participant group had more age diversity with ages ranging from the early 20s to one man in his 70s.

All of the Khmer respondents were born and currently lived in Cambodia. The foreign respondents were predominately from Europe, 10/23, and Australia or New Zealand, 8/23. There were 3/23 foreign respondents from North America and 2/23 were from Asian countries other than Cambodia.

The largest amount of Khmer respondents worked in the private sector, 34/51. The majority of these men said they worked in hotels and restaurants. The second largest occupation among the Khmer men interviewed was full-time students, 7/51. The private sector was also the most frequent source of income among the foreign respondents, with 12/23 of the men working for privately owned businesses or being self-employed. Similar to the Khmer men who worked in the private sector, the majority of the foreign men worked in the service industry at either a restaurant or hotel.

The majority of the Khmer men were single at the time of the interview, 36/51. Eight of the Khmer men were married and all of them said they were married to women. Four of the 51 Khmer respondents were divorced and 3/51 were placed in a category of other because they had a boyfriend, were in a civil partnership, or engaged to be married. Ten of the 23 foreign men interviewed were single, 3/23 were divorced, and 8/23 were considered other. Two of the foreign men were married to each other at the time of the interview.

Sexual Orientation and Openness About Same-Sex Relationships

Orientation designates the gender of one's attraction and sexual desire, while identity refers to one's own sense of 'gender belonging' and the disclosed or undisclosed self-association with this gender. Gender expression is far more fluid than sexual orientation, gender identity, or biological sex. Gender expression refers to the way a person chooses to behave, dress, speak, etc. Through this behaviour and appearance, a person may align him or herself among traditional gender binary aspects of masculinity or femininity. Out of the 23 foreigner participants in this

research, 17 of the men identified themselves to be homosexual and six said they were bisexual. The highest number of foreign respondents understood their sexual orientation between the ages of 10-14. Virtually all the foreigners, 21/23, gave 'male' as their preference, whereas a significant number of Khmer gave both 'male' and 'female,' 17/51. The highest percentage of both Khmer and foreign men said their preference was for men. Since cultural perceptions of sexual orientation in Cambodia differ from the traditional Western definitions, the researchers used the questions to verify the respondents did in fact have sexual intercourse with men, thus making them suitable to participate in the study.

Seventeen of the foreign respondents said that they were open about their sexuality with everyone in their lives and only one foreign respondent answered that he was not open with anyone. There was a split between the Khmer men who were open with everyone in their lives and those who were open with only their friends. The respondents were asked if they had encountered any discrimination because of their sexuality. For Khmer, 27/51 said they received discrimination because of their sexuality, and 14/23 foreigners said they had as well.

Use of Prostitution

There is a visible age difference between the Khmer and foreign groups with regards to first use of prostitutes. Buying sexual services from male sex workers was reported by foreign participants to have most frequently (7/19) begun after the age of 40, whereas it was said to have begun before the age of 18 by 14/46 Khmer participants and most frequently (21/46) among Khmer men aged 18 to 21 years.

Of the respondents, 47 Khmer and 19 foreign men had paid for sex with men. However, this excludes the one Khmer and one foreign respondents who said that they had never paid for sex with men, but also reported having received an erotic massage before. Thus, 48/51 Khmer and 20/23 foreign interviewees stated having paid for sexual services from male sex workers. Moreover, just over half (27/51) of the Khmer population interviewed and about a sixth (4/23) of the foreigners reported having received compensation for sex. This involved money and other forms of payment.

Ninety percent (46/51) of Khmer men had purchased sex, along with 15/23 (65%) foreigners. Four foreign men and one Khmer man purchased sex in the past but a noteworthy amount of time had passed since they had done so. The vast majority of the Khmer and foreign men who had purchased sexual services reported having a neutral or negative view of prostitution. In most cases, the neutral response did not signify that the interviewee had no particular opinion on the issue, but rather saw both positive and negative aspects to prostitution. Both

groups of respondents who had a negative view of prostitution spoke of prostitution as a dangerous profession and an objectionable source of revenue.

Even with a simple understanding of prostitution being payment for sex, it is crucial to be aware of circumstances in which it remains ambiguous whether the payment is being made for sex. Since this study focused on the demand for male sex workers, and as payment for the sex is made in various forms, respondents were asked whether they had ever paid or offered compensation in exchange for sex with men. There were three main paradigms that the respondents have encountered while purchasing sex. They describe the different ways that a male sex worker would acquire financial benefit from their clients.

Money-boy	The agreement and price of exchanging money for sex is discussed up front before sexual intercourse takes place.
Baiting	No money is discussed before sexual intercourse, but when the activity is finished the ‘seller’ asks the ‘client’ for money for something other than the sex i.e. to fix his motor-bike, or to support a family member who is in the hospital.
Professional Boyfriend	A man and a sex worker are in a relationship together-typically the non-sex worker helps financially support his ‘boyfriend’ and there is often confusion and displacement of commitment and attraction levels between the two parties

Table 2: Three Paradigms of Giving Compensation Within the MSMSW Sex Industry in Cambodia

Roughly two-thirds (33/48) of the Khmer and about one-third (7/20) of the foreign interviewees who stated paying for sex reported having formed a romantic relationship with a male sex worker. Khmer respondents most often mentioned having had a prostitute as a sweetheart and/or giving him gifts, whereas a few foreigners mentioned having had a boyfriend who was a male sex worker, but that prostitution eventually negatively impacted their relationship. Both mentioned helping boyfriends who were male sex workers financially.

Thirty-six of the 51 Khmer respondents said they always wear a condom when having sex, one man said that he never wears one, and 14/51 of the Khmer men said they wear one depending on who their partner is. They expanded by saying if they trusted their partner it would depend and that they would always wear a condom if they were sleeping with a prostitute. Nine of the 23 foreign

respondents said that they always used a condom, one man said he never wears one, 2/23 said they sometimes wear condoms, and 11/23 said that it depended on the partner. The foreign men who said their condom use depended on the partner clarified if they were with a partner they would not wear a condom but with anyone else they would.

Views of Prostitution

On the whole, the Cambodian and foreign men interviewed had a fairly mixed view of prostitution saying some positives and some negatives about the industry and the individual sex workers themselves. When asked specifically about their views towards an individual prostitute, both the Khmer and foreigners had a more negative outlook. Many of the Khmer focused on how prostitutes had bad morals and a lower social standing whereas the foreign respondents said that the sex workers were deceptive and dangerous to their own personal safety. The vast majority of Khmer respondents (47/51) asserted that they see prostitutes differently from people who do not sell sex, whereas about two-thirds of the foreign participants (15/22) stated they saw no difference. Slightly over half of the Khmer participants (27/51) replied they would treat prostitutes differently from men known not to engage in commercial sex. For the foreign participants, the trend remained essentially the same, with most of them (17/22) responding that they would treat prostitutes no differently than non-prostitutes.

Pornography and Prostitution Use

There appeared to be a positive correlation between the uses of pornography and prostitution among the Khmer men, with 37/48 answering this way. It appeared to be the opposite among the foreign respondents, with only one man saying watching pornography influences his prostitution habits. There was an overwhelming response of Khmer men who said that they would watch pornography and then would seek to pay for sex afterward (15/26). Three of the Khmer respondents said they watched pornography so that they could learn new techniques to use, implying that they used pornography as a sexual education tool.

Discussion

Demographics

In the MSFSW study, the age of the respondent was a major factor in if a person uses a prostitute or not. The percentage of the respondents who have never

used a prostitute begins to taper off after the youngest age group, while the percentage of the ‘currently use’ and ‘have used in the past’ respondents begins to grow exponentially. Sixty-two percent of the MSFSW respondents who currently use prostitutes fall into the 30-49 age range, along with 46% of the ‘not anymore’ respondents. Respondents were asked why they had not had sex with a prostitute. Many Cambodian respondents who were under 24 years old had not lost their virginity yet. Some Khmer respondents said they were nervous about having sex, especially sex with a prostitute, because a common understanding is that prostitutes are ‘very good’ at having sex. Some foreign youth respondents would not pay for sex because they could get it “for free” with a girlfriend or female acquaintance. A possible reason could be that in Western countries, it is seen to be culturally more acceptable for women to have sex before marriage. Virginity in Cambodia is highly prized, so women who have sex outside of marriage are seen as highly promiscuous.²³

Sexual Orientation

Many of the Khmer men interviewed in the MSMSW study appeared to show a misunderstanding when they were asked how they would define their sexual orientation because in Cambodia and other Southeast Asian cultures sexual orientation is inherently linked to gender identity. For example, when asked about his ‘openness’ with family and friends regarding his sexual orientation, one Khmer respondent was adamant about being heterosexual, even though he had intercourse with men. He said, “There is nothing to be open about. I’m completely straight.” The sample group in this study appeared to show an understanding of sexual orientation in Cambodia congruent with previous research on this topic.

View of Prostitution

One of the most interesting findings in MSMSW study was that a little over half the Khmer men interviewed had both bought and sold sex. A certain ‘life-cycle’ of switching from the selling of sex to the buying did unfold. An example of this ‘life-cycle’ is captured in a quote from one of the Khmer participants, “When I was younger, I needed money and everyone wanted to buy me. I also enjoyed the sex and I could eat good meals. Now I am mostly the buyer and as long as I don’t hurt anyone it’s okay.” A man describing the advantages of paying for sex gave a quote further describing this oversight; “Because I have money, I buy sex. I don’t

²³ Jennifer Collins and Kuch Naren, “Two unsolved rapes and killings belong to a larger trend as more Cambodians report sexual assaults,” *The Cambodia Daily*. retrieved 14 May 2004, <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/stories-of-the-month/two-unsolved-rapes-killings-belong-to-a-larger-trend-as-more-cambodians-report-sexual-assaults-376/>

care what society thinks because I never force prostitutes to go with me. They need money, so I give it to them.” Many foreigners and only a few Khmer, though not necessarily confined to moral uneasiness, implied forms of discomfort with engaging in paying for sex. The majority of the Khmer respondents, versus approximately half of the foreign respondents said they felt positive afterwards. None of the Khmer responses expressed moral reservations but rather there appeared to be a societal normalcy to paying for sex among this research’s sample group.

What emerges from the open answers given to all the questions about the view of prostitution appears to be a more neutral view on prostitution. The majority of respondents in both studies had a neutral view of prostitution (55/99 in the MSFSW study and 50/72 in the MSMSW study). There were certain negative views towards prostitutes themselves. In the Khmer group, several interviewees mentioned the sex workers’ lower social standing, whereas participants spoke of their limited skills and opportunities. Respondents in both groups associated prostitutes with dangers to personal safety or property, sometimes implying and sometimes openly citing their involvement in or association with risky or illegal activities. Several Khmer participants stated that prostitutes have lower moral standards than other people, while foreigners tended to express the perspective that prostitutes do what they do out of need.

	MSFSW Responses	MSMSW Responses
Khmer	<p>“It’s a release of sexual tension...after sleeping with a prostitute I don’t feel that sexual desire anymore.”</p> <p>“I was nervous because I didn’t know if I had the ability to have sex, and prostitutes are very good in doing sex.”</p>	<p>“Because I have money, I buy sex. I don’t care what society thinks because I never force prostitutes to go with me. They need money so I give it to them.”</p> <p>Themes: It is their business or choice; they do it because there is a demand; it is necessary, it is natural to need sex.</p>
Foreign	<p>“In the West it is different, there are many opportunities there for women and they don’t have to prostitute themselves. Here, there is little education and jobs are scarce so some women have to.”</p> <p>“It’s a win-win-situation for both, I have sex and so I help her [the prostitute’s] family.”</p>	<p>“It has not much to do with intimacy. There is also the risk of encouraging them to stay in the industry rather than leaving it.”</p> <p>Themes: Prostitutes need money and lack skills or alternatives; prostitution can be exploitative.</p>

Table 3: Comparison of responses to question on view of prostitution

The Khmer respondents of the MSFSW study who had a neutral view of prostitution gave reasons that were of a different nature than those from the foreigners. While the Khmer men focused on more intrinsic factors, the Western men were largely focused on extrinsic factors. Of the Khmer population, the only respondents with a positive view on prostitution were the five who were currently paying for sex, appearing to show that there is a higher focus on the neutrality or negativity of prostitution among the Cambodian population. Khmer men who answered having a negative view on prostitution actively participated in the industry because they said it is a man’s right to have sex and that a man takes care of his sexual urges by sleeping with women as opposed to masturbation, which

taboo in Cambodian culture. The most common response given by Khmer men to the question about how they feel after sex with a prostitute was 'normal'. This indicates a sense of normalcy after paying for sexual release with a prostitute. The majority of foreign men responded as feeling positive after having paid for sex, which could be based on the reason for seeking out a prostitute for pleasure or companionship instead of simply for sexual release. The findings suggest the foreign population interviewed was more conscious of a greater range of potentially negative impacts surrounding the practice of paying for sex than the Khmer population interviewed.

View of Women

In the MSFSW study, a common assumption was that men who have sex with prostitutes have a lower view of women. Close to 50% of the foreign men who were currently buying services from prostitutes had either a negative or neutral view of women. In contrast, men who had never paid for sex or did not want to pay for sex anymore rarely answered negative or neutral. The majority of foreign men answered 'positive' when asked about their view on women, whereas a majority of the Khmer respondents answered 'neutral'. The lack of a strong opinion on women by Khmer men can be seen as symptomatic of the cultural structures. The rigidity of these structures appears to not allow for personal interpretation, but rather a collective understanding that being 'Khmer' means living within these norms. In contrast, Western society may have more of a culture of individuality, which allows for more divergent opinions to be formed through personal experience and not social norms.

Relationship between Pornography and Prostitution Use

Pornography appeared to be the largest influencer for Khmer men in the MSFSW study to seek prostitutes, with 80% of the men answering that they were influenced by pornography. Since there is a cultural taboo on masturbation in Cambodia, these men said that after watching porn they would be sexually aroused and would seek to pay for sex instead of releasing that tension themselves. The Khmer interviewees also said that they wanted to experience the various positions and activities they had seen within the pornographic material, and thus, was another reason to seek a prostitute.

In the MSMSW study, when asked if their pornography viewing affected their prostitution habits, the majority of responses among the Khmer were affirmative, compared with only one affirmative response among foreign men. The vast majority of reasons given was along the lines of wanting to try what they had

just seen in a video or increased sexual desire shortly afterwards. Taken together with the responses from the Khmer men interviewed, pornography appears to have some part in fueling unrealistic expectations towards sexual relationships within the sample, which in turn can affect prostitution use.

Summary

A handful of the Khmer responses indicated a broader understanding of prostitution as consisting of both the supply and demand, but the foreign men gave even more responses of this nature. For example, the foreign participants reasoned that because there is a demand there should be a supply. However, most of the foreigners' responses were focused on the situation of the prostitute, including some that stated that prostitution could be exploitative. Amongst those with negative views, most foreigners saw problems with the industry itself, whereas most Khmer men saw the supply as the cause of the problem. Whether or not Khmer respondents were aware of the exploitation present in prostitution can only be indirectly inferred, the focus of their answers was most certainly not upon this area.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Organizations operating without a deep understanding of the complex issues surrounding the sex industry in Southeast Asia can only offer simplistic solutions because they do not understand the complexity of the viewpoints of the demand population. The "Listening to the Demand" two-part study conducted by independent researchers on the sex industry in Cambodia delivers information on the differences in culture between the foreign and Khmer men who seek to pay for sexual services. The respondents' answers provide a deeper knowledge of the beliefs and behaviours among the demand.

The research findings show that the reasons to pay and not pay for sex appear to be different between the foreigner and Cambodian populations. The Cambodian men interviewed tended to give intrinsic responses to these questions, whereas the foreign responses tended to be more extrinsic. The Cambodian men stated that a disadvantage to buying sex is that it is a waste of their own time and money, and they were at risk of contracting STIs. The foreign men said that a disadvantage is the safety of the sex workers themselves. In the MSMSW study, Khmer men interviewed viewed prostitution as negative because it was bad for society and not necessarily for the individual who is selling sex. As a result, NGOs doing outreach need to approach these two populations with two different campaigns. A campaign to the foreign population may focus on the impacts of

prostitution on the women themselves and their relationship with their families. A campaign to reach out to the Cambodian men needs to focus more on the impact of prostitution use on their own family and economic situations. There needs to be an understanding of the everyday challenges that prostitutes face so that they are seen as people of equal value and not sub-human.

This and other past research on Khmer males appear to show that there are static cultural boundaries defining how a 'real' Cambodian man is to behave. Material needs to be developed within sex education courses specifically on gender identity. This sex education course needs to highlight healthy sexual activities that encourage safety. Educating communities regarding the risk of contracting and transmitting HIV/AIDS and other STIs are an important ongoing service in Cambodia. There also appears to be a lack of formal sexual education for men in Cambodia who have or want to have sex with other men. The reduction of high-risk behaviours within this community (such as an awareness of the need to use a condom, water-based lubricants, communication between partners about comfort levels, etc.), can and will promote greater health and wellbeing among men in Cambodia. As seen in this research, the use of pornography influenced 80% of the Khmer men interviewed into paying for sex with men. The reason Khmer men said that porn influenced their prostitution habit was that they wanted to experience the various activities they had seen in the various pornographic videos. This can be seen as porn being a sex educator, which can be dangerous for the viewer to be given unrealistic expectations during sexual activity. Pornography may be seen to encourage self-gratification rather than mutual love and respect; pornography can also create feelings of unattainable body images and libido of self and sexual partner.

There was a higher proportion of Khmer men who were open about their sexuality than initially expected, showing there appears to be a changing climate among the Khmer population and sexuality. However, this research appears to show that about a third of the Khmer men who expressed that they were 'not comfortable' talking about their sexuality among family, friends, and colleagues. These stigmas could be further lessened through the education of the larger Cambodian population to not discriminate against people of different sexualities, and that the LGBT individual can live as an equal within society.

The faith-based communities need to work more closely with the LGBT community. Individuals and organizations need to put aside any pre-conceived understandings so that there is time to consider just how we can best help exploited people. Faith-based organizations have often chosen to ignore these issues because of concerns of how they will be perceived, but listening and collaborating with those who understand this community better (the LGBTQ community) seems to be the best way forward. The results led the research team to consider if there are

particular ways that the LGBT and faith-based communities can be encouraged to protect young gay men from being exploited. Through an increased understanding of the male demand and their experiences, it is hoped that exploitation of male sex workers can be combated.

There is a need for further research on the demand for the sex industry in Southeast Asia, specifically on the psychology behind why men pay for sex. There is also a need to understand the high rate of MSMSW individuals in Cambodia who have bought and sold sex. These types of research would help the anti-trafficking community further understand the complex factors of inequality in order to offer culturally appropriate solutions.

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