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GUIDELINES FOR PREVENTING BOYS FROM ENTERING INTO PROSTITUTION IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

This mixed, predominantly quantitative research aims to identify 1) the current status of boy prostitutes in Thailand; 2) steps leading boys into prostitution in Thailand; 3) factors inducing boys to enter prostitution, and 4) guidelines for preventing boys from entering into prostitution. The research sample consisted of 140 male service workers between the ages of 15 and 20. Questionnaires were used to collect the data, which were subjected to a Path Analysis. The study found: 1) no male service workers were under 18 years of age, but a small number were under 20 years of age; 2) peer influence, chiefly through word of mouth, influenced the boys who entered prostitution; 3) work attitudes and sexual attitudes were also influences; and 4) close family relationships are key to preventing boys into prostitution. Preventing children from entering prostitution starts with the family. Parents need to care for their children with love and understanding. Broken family situations contribute to children running away from home, and subsequently forces them to support themselves by every possible means, both legal and illegal. Schools need to take more active roles in preventing children from entering into prostitution. They should foster in children a sense of human dignity, stressing how prostitution deprives sex workers of human value and human dignity. Initiatives should also stress how buyers of sex services deprive sex workers of their human dignity and of better opportunities in life. The state itself should make the public aware of legal punishments applicable to those involved in buying and selling sex services, and of how the buying and selling of sex services is a shameless violation of human value and dignity.

RATIONALE

Prostitution has long existed in Thai society with written evidence dating back to the Ayutthaya period. In today's changing social and economic environment with the mass exchange of people and cultures made possible by globalization, prostitution now comes in many different forms. Male prostitutes have now joined the circle originally dominated by females. Sex services, which were once provided solely for customers of the opposite sex, are now also offered to customers of the same sex. Prostitutes were once of adults but now include children—boys and girls (United Nation Population Fund, 2017). Sexual preference, which is now more open and more accepted in society, contributes to the increasing sexual abuse of children. Child prostitutes are essentially treated like merchandise, as objects of sexual exploitation, with no human feelings. This sexual exploitation violates human rights, is inhumane, and deprives children of their dignity.

Boy prostitution, once receiving little public attention, has become an increasingly visible problem that needs immediate attention from the public and private sectors, as well as the general public. Economic pressures resulting from accelerated industrialization have caused family alienation or distance. Parents spend most of their time working to support their families, leaving their children in the care of the schools. Some children who have no family protection, or those who are unable to enter the school system have to work to support themselves or even their families. The traditional extended family has dwindled in number, while the number of nuclear families has shot up. This change in family structure leaves family members, particularly children, with fewer people or even no one to turn to when they face problems.

Children who are alienated from their families or schools, or raised in pressing cultural, social, and living conditions, all too often run away in order to avoid problems. Some children gather for unlawful purposes. Some become involved in stealing or other serious crimes, and some are manipulated by criminals. These negative behaviors are often intended to harm the society in which they have grown up or to strike back at the forces they see as responsible for their miserable lives.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (2006), most sex workers throughout Asia entered the commercial sex industry at a young age. Family problems and increasing demand for sex with children during a time of economic growth fueled the expansion of the sex business. In addition, the belief that children were clean and HIV-free meant that younger sex workers had more clients than their older counterparts. The factors inducing boys to enter into prostitution included those at national, community, and personal levels.

Thailand's national economic development policy prioritized economic growth and materialism. Subsequently, tourism, for example, uses service industries to attract Thai and non-Thai tourists alike.

The community-level factors include professional values, materialistic aspects of local culture, and lack of opportunities for jobs with a steady income.

At the personal and family levels, the most influential factor driving boys into prostitution was materialistic parents, who instilled in their children values that promoted prostitution as a source of good, easy money. Other family conditions also played a part.

These factors at all three levels have induced children to enter the sex trade willingly, or they have been coerced or deceived into prostitution. A number of parties have been involved in driving children into this industry, namely parents, relatives, close associates, and community leaders, to name a few.

Child prostitution has, therefore, tarnished the country's image and exacted a heavy toll on the children themselves, many of whom have contracted HIV/AIDS or become drug addicts. In addition, child prostitution is a serious violation of Article 34 of the Convention on the Rights of Children, which protects children from all manners of sexual exploitation. Aware of the seriousness of this problem, the researchers have conducted a study aimed to develop guidelines for preventing boys from entering prostitution with the hope that children will truly enjoy the full protections specified in the Convention.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To study the steps taken by boys who enter into prostitution in Thailand;
2. To study factors influencing boys to enter into prostitution in Thailand;
3. To develop guidelines for preventing boys from entering into prostitution.

Benefits expected from the research

1. Awareness of current conditions of boy prostitution in Thailand.
2. Awareness of steps leading boys into prostitution in Thailand.
3. Awareness of actual factors influencing boys to enter into prostitution in Thailand.
4. Effective, realistic and practical guidelines for preventing boys from entering prostitution.

RESEARCH SCOPE

The primary sample for this research consisted of 140 young male sex workers from 15 to 20 years of age.

The secondary sample for this research consisted of 2 groups.

Group 1 was a total of 10 authorities or representatives from the following 10 organizations, with one representing each organization:

- 1 Secretary Office, Anti-Human Trafficking Commission, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security
2. Civil Service Center, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security
3. Action Center for National Anti- Human Trafficking
4. Anti- Human Trafficking Division, Central Investigation Bureau
5. Child and Women Welfare Division, Metropolitan Police Bureau
6. Foundation to Stop Sexual Exploitation of Children
7. United Nations Act on Anti-Human Trafficking (UNIAP)
8. Action Center for Anti-Human Trafficking, the Mirror Foundation
9. Foundation of Child Understanding (FOCUS)
10. Human Rights and Development Foundation

Group 2 included 10 people consisting of suppliers of boy sex workers, customers, dealers, agents, or transporters.

Terminology

Boys refers to male children from 15 to 20 years of age.

Sale of sexual services refers to having sexual relations with male heterosexual or homosexual customers in exchange for money either by the hour or overnight. Sexual services can come in the form of masturbation, oral sex, anal sex or any other sexual act.

Gays refers to males who prefer to have sex with people of the same sex.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The steps for conducting this research were illustrated below:

First step: Identify conditions of boy prostitution in Thailand with in-depth interview

Second step: Identify steps of boys entering into prostitution in Thailand with in-depth interview

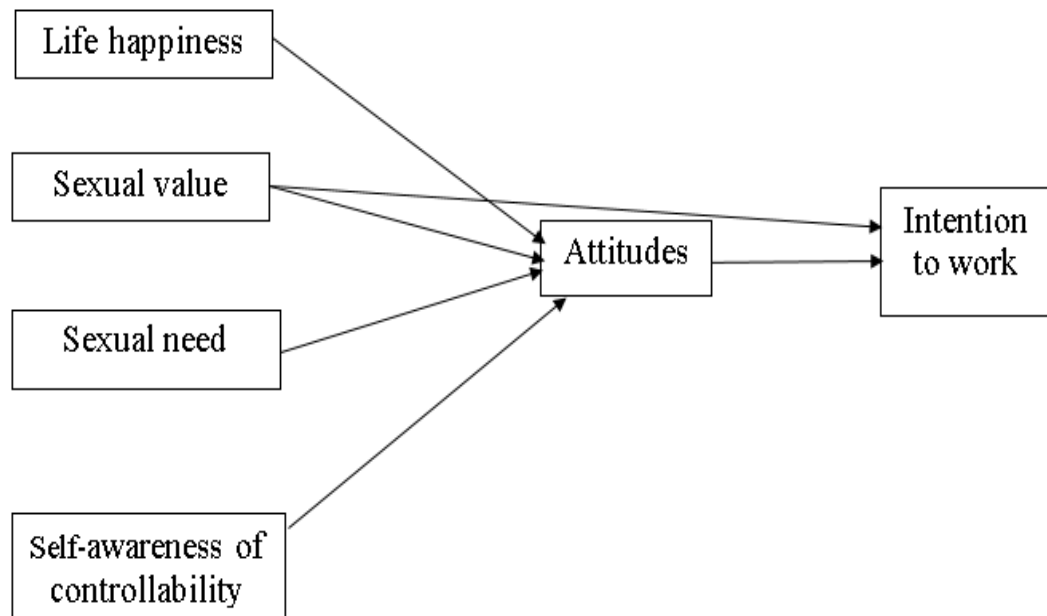
Third step: Identify factors influencing boys into prostitution in Thailand with using questionnaire

Forth step: Construct guidelines for preventing boys from entering prostitution in Thailand

Final step: Receive guidelines for preventing boys from entering prostitution in Thailand

Conceptual Framework

After the in-depth interviews, the researchers formulated a conceptual framework using the guidelines of Ajzen (2006), as illustrated below:



RESEARCH FINDINGS

General data of the sample

Most of the participants in the sample group had upper secondary school education (36.0%), followed by those with lower secondary school education (24.3%), and those with a high vocational certificate (14.4%).

Most in the sample group had parents still living together (42.3%), followed by parents who had separated (25.2%), and parents who had passed away (22.5%).

Most in the sample group were farmers (53.2%), followed by those who accepted any employment available (26.2%), and merchants/vendors (11.7%).

Most in the sample group were close to both parents (51.30%), followed by those who were close to their mothers only (22.0%), and those not close to either parent (11.9%).

Most in the sample group came from the Northeast (48.6%), followed by those from the North (18.0%), and those from the East (12.6%).

Most in the sample group intended to remain in the commercial sex industry for at least another month (52.3%), followed by those undecided about what to do (44.1%), and those who would certainly quit the business (44.1%).

Most in the sample group were single, with no partners (56.8%), followed by those with partners (18.0%), and those with developing relationships, but not partners (25.3%).

Most in the sample group were raised in a lenient, democratic environment (57.7%), followed by those who were neglected (30.6%), and those whose who were raised in a strict household environment (8.1%).

Most in the sample group were persuaded by peers to sell sex (58.6%), followed by relatives (19.8%), and then by sex business owners (8.1%).

The effect of those who persuaded on decision-making was at a medium level (46.8%), a low level (16.2%), and the lowest level (18.9%).

Most in the sample were homosexual (46.89%), followed by heterosexual (40.5%), and bisexual (12.6%).

Most in the sample had never bought sex services (71.2%), in contrast to those who had (28.8%).

Most in the sample bought sex from male prostitutes (69.8%), followed by from female prostitutes (18.8%), and from both male and female prostitutes (9.4%).

Most in the sample reported having sexual desire at level 5 (20.7%), followed by those with sexual desire at levels 7 and 10 (18.9%), and those at level 8 (9.9%).
Most in the sample reported their life happiness at level 8 (20.7%), followed by level 9 (16.2%), and level 10 (15.3%).

Table 1 Standardized regression coefficient between cause variables and result variables

Variables	Attitude towards work $R^2=.22$			Intention to continue $R^2=.10$		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
Attitude toward work	-	-	-	.280** (.117)	-	.280** (.117)
Awareness of controllability	.382** (.066)	-	.382** (.066)	-	.107** (.043)	.107** (.043)
sexual value	.113 (.077)	-	.113 (.077)	-.186* (.104)	.031 (.027)	-.155 (.106)

sexual desire	-.028 (.016)	-	-.028 (.016)	-	-.008 (.028)	-.008 (.028)
life happiness	.192* (.017)	-	.192* (.017)	-	.054* (.034)	.054* (.034)

Note ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, in parentheses is SE

The chart shows attitude to work as the most direct effect on the intention to work with the effect size of .280 with a statistical significance of .01, followed by sexual value with the effect size of -.186 with a statistical significance of .01.

The chart also shows the awareness of controllability, further enhanced by work attitude, as the most indirect effect on the intention to continue to work through with the effect size of .107 with a statistical significance of .05, followed by life happiness with the effect size of .054 and a statistical significance of .05.

The chart also shows the ANOVA regarding intention to continue to work (10%), and the ANOVA regarding attitude to work (20%).

DISCUSSION

The discussion is divided into 4 parts:

1. Concerning the conditions of boy sex workers, the study revealed that there were no boy sex workers under 18 years of age, though there were a small number under the age of 20. This was due to the fact that soliciting sex with children under the age of 18 is a serious violation of the law (although prostitution as a whole is also illegal), and the fact that the research targeted boy sex workers employed as waiters in restaurants, dancers in bars, or masseurs in massage parlors. These businesses were particularly careful when recruiting boys because to employ boys under 18 as (clandestine) sex workers posed too great a risk to their businesses.

2. Concerning the steps leading boys into prostitution, the study revealed that peers, through word of mouth, had the most influence on boys entering prostitution. The boys were aware of the nature of their prospective work before making their decisions to enter the sex business. Most of these boys came from poor farming families, had only secondary school education, and had previously tried other kinds of jobs to make a living. Therefore, when they were invited to do an easier and better-paid job, they unhesitatingly agreed. This finding corresponded to the work of Tipanya (2006) on the life and health patterns of male sex workers in Chiangmai Mueang District. That study likewise revealed similar family backgrounds, i.e. most of them came from poor farming families, had limited education, and wanted to have easier and better-paid jobs to support themselves and their families. They freely entered this profession, or were convinced by friends. These sex workers knew how to take care of their bodies and their health, particularly their physical

health. They were aware of the need to protect themselves from contracting HIV and other venereal diseases. They sought medical treatment from hospitals, or bought medicine from nearby pharmacies when they were sick. They were uncertain whether to remain in prostitution or to leave it and when to leave it.

3. Concerning the influencing factors for boys to enter prostitution, the study revealed that work attitudes impacted their willingness to be in this profession. Prostitution was viewed as an easy job with good pay that enabled them to support their needy families financially. They could even save money from sex work if they took good care of their clients. Most of them, when asked, saw themselves continuing in this profession at least for the next month. It was considered an easy job with good money, and above all, it was better than having no work at all. This finding corresponded to the research by Chayanattaphat (2013), who in a study of male sex workers at gay bars in the Surawong area, identified three factors influencing males to enter prostitution, namely income, accessibility to information, and homosexual experience. They did not see commercial sex as something wrong, but as another form of sexual release, and as responsive to the needs of homosexual males, who paid them 1000-3000 baht for each encounter. This study also revealed the following negative impacts on these sex workers: health problems, sexually-transmitted diseases, job insecurity, and the lack of legal protections. The study also revealed their wish to be accepted into mainstream society.

Another factor influencing work attitude was life happiness. The study revealed that these sex workers had life happiness at level 8 on a scale of 1-10, in spite of the earlier-mentioned negative impacts on them. Another factor influencing work attitudes was controllability, the perception that they had control over their own lives: whether to leave or when to leave prostitution was their own decision. They were all aware of the insecurity of this job and were looking for opportunities for new jobs. This sense of control contributed to a positive attitude toward the commercial sex business, and to their decision to remain in the trade.

The study revealed that sexual value also had an impact on sex workers' decision to remain in the business. They did not view sexual relations with people who were not their spouses or partners as wrong or unethical. This research finding corresponded to the study conducted by Kaewlomsup (2001), which revealed that materialistic values, a preference to work on their own terms, a preference for working at night, and a preference for homosexual acts, all contributed to their decision to remain in or enter prostitution. Their limited education, poor families, and the demand for male sex workers to perform same-sex activities had paved their way into prostitution, with no fear of legal punishment. Furthermore, celebrities' involvement in same-sex relationships and the lack of serious legal enforcement against prostitution have been largely ignored by society. These factors also made it easier for less-educated boys from poorer families to decide to enter prostitution.

4) Concerning factors for preventing boys from entering prostitution, the study revealed that close family relationships were most effective. Children with caring and understanding parents who made them feel loved, provided for, and secure were unlikely to run away from home and take up work that is illegal and can be dangerous.

Schools and relevant organizations need to be active in fostering a sense of human dignity through their instructional activities, and planning, so that children do not fall victim to sexual exploitation. The general public should also be made aware that selling and buying sex degrade human dignity and deprive children of the basic human right to stand in society with dignity. It is important, too, to raise awareness of the legal punishments that selling and soliciting sex entail.

The state itself needs to take a leading role in initiating the concept of human dignity. The state needs to make the public aware of legal punishments to which those involved in buying and selling sex service are subject, and how these two practices abuse children sexually, take away their human value and dignity, and deprive the underprivileged of better opportunities in life.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

1. This quantitative research, though conducted on a large collection of data and based on a complex statistical analysis, may not fully reflect the conditions of boys who enter prostitution at the national level. The future research should be conducted at a national level to have a much clearer view of child prostitution.

2. Work attitudes were revealed to impact the children's intention and decision to enter and remain in the commercial sex business. Changing these attitudes may result in the decision to leave this profession and enter other more "legal, and ethical" ones. Relevant organizations should take this into account when developing programs and activities to change attitudes and the choice of profession.

3. Sexual attitudes were revealed to impact the children's intention and decision to enter or remain in the commercial sex industry. Their "liberal" ideas about sex led them to enter willingly into prostitution. They should be made to realize that sexual attitudes and prostitution are two separate entities, and that prostitution also has many downsides, including more chances to contract serious diseases.

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