

"TO HELP MY PARENTS"

An Exploratory Study on the Hidden Vulnerabilities
of Street-Involved Children and Youth in Chiang Mai

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The views expressed in this research are the views of the authors and may not necessarily reflect the views of Urban Light Foundation.

Introduction

The global reality of exploitation and violence is a deeply human issue, which transcends gender, race, and socio-economic realities. Yet despite this reality, much social research in this area commonly focuses its attention on household studies, with a particular focus on the vulnerabilities of women and girls. While these studies can be useful, they often belie the fact that a significant amount of exploitation and violence occurs to persons outside of households and/or those not appearing in national population measures. Further, phenomenological studies on child vulnerability continue to show young men, boys, and transgender persons to be greatly vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and other (often severe) forms of violence--particularly among those living and/or working on the streets.

A key reason for this is that social and cultural norms often assume men and boys to be inherently strong and/or invulnerable to sexual exploitation. While these long-held assumptions on male invulnerability are strong and often foundational to much of the literature available on gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, a small but growing body of research in this area continues to show these assumptions to be false. Due to the general lack of awareness of the vulnerability of males to sexual abuse and exploitation, the efforts of organizations and individuals who desire to provide for the needs of male victims often go under-supported. Over the past four years, Dr. Glenn Miles and Jarrett Davis, with the support of Love146 and up! international, have made addressing the exploitation of such underrepresented groups a primary focus in their work, and often do this by partnering with key organizations that are pioneering such work. This study that you hold in your hands is a part of that endeavor.

This is the third of a multi-part series of exploratory, baseline studies that look into the lives, experiences and vulnerabilities of street-involved (street living / street working) children in SE Asia. While qualitative tools are used and some limited generalizations are made on data gathered, these studies are intentionally smaller in scale, but aim to provide a deeper and more qualitative analysis. As a part of this, the research team has attempted to preserve the individual voices of the children and youth that we have met through the process of conducting this study. As we include their voices, it is our hope that we are able to integrate their narratives into the greater social context of which they are a part.

While we believe the findings within this study to be useful, we also understand that they are ultimately insufficient and serve only as short glance at the 'tip of an iceberg' concerning the vulnerabilities of such groups to violence and exploitation. It is our desire that this brief baseline of information will aid in the development of new projects and initiatives among our implementing partners, as well as serving as a foundation for new and more nuanced research looking at vulnerable and/or overlooked people groups in the SE Asia region.

The title of this report, "To Help My Parents", is a direct quote from a 12-year-old boy who has spent the whole of his life working on the streets in Chiang Mai. Like many of the children interviewed in this report, he is a survivor of both sexual and physical violence experienced during his work on the streets. Yet despite his experiences, he cites that his greatest source of pride is found in his ability to help his parents in their work on the streets. Cases such as his transcend the often-cold statistics and analytical figures of social science and tell of hidden resiliencies that are deeply human. It is our hope that such narratives give a human depth and quality to the cases of which you are about to read.

Executive Summary

This report presents outcomes and key discussion from research conducted among ‘street-involved’ youth in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The research provides a baseline of information and an initial analysis of the key needs, vulnerabilities, and potential resiliencies of children and youth living and/or working on the streets of Chiang Mai. The research aims to provide a more nuanced and informed discussion on child and youth vulnerabilities in Chiang Mai from a phenomenological perspective, and provide an information resource for social service providers, policy makers, child protection advocates, and social researchers in the region.

The study partnered with social workers from the Chiang Mai-based NGO, Urban Light, in March through May of 2015 to conduct 55 semi-structured interviews with street-involved girls and boys aged 11 to 24 years of age. Among the sampling are 28 males (51%), 25 are females (45%), and two identify as “ladyboys” or transgender persons (4%). The interviews focus on a number of key areas of the respondents’ lives including: demographics, social and family relationships, financial security, sexual history, instances of violence and sexual abuse, health, emotional wellbeing, and future plans. This broad range of data is used to assess present and potential vulnerabilities to various forms of violence with a particular focus on sexual exploitation and abuse.

This study reveals a high prevalence of sexual violence among street-involved youth in Chiang Mai. Notably, a higher prevalence of sexual violence is found among males’ respondents, in comparison with female respondents with 54% of males and 29% of females citing sexual touching by adults. Beyond this, 29% of males and 9% of females cite instances in which they had been forced to have sex against their wishes. Street-involved males were also acutely susceptible to commercial sexual exploitation, also in higher proportions than females (56% of males, 26% of females, and both transgendered respondents). Further, ethnicity and being a survivor of sexual abuse are indicated as potential special risk factors toward commercial sexual exploitation and drug use. Living on the street is an additional aspect that increases risks of exposure to all types of violence.

This research attempts to define and add nuance to the often little-known needs and vulnerabilities of street-involved children and youth and provides recommendations for program development, future research, and continued vigilance against violence and exploitation of vulnerable groups of children in northern Thailand.

Literature Review

Street-Involved Children Globally

Official estimations of street-involved children are contested; however, commonly cited figures hold the global population of street-involved children to be around 100 million (Thomas de Benítez, 2011). Exact figures for street-involved groups are difficult to calculate as these populations are frequently on the move, are often unregistered, and commonly exist outside of formal societal structures. Street-involved children are mainly found in urban settings, in living situations commonly imbricated in issues related to unsafe migration, human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC), drug use, and violence (Coren E, Hossain R, Pardo Pardo J, Veras MMS et al, 2013).

Street-Involved Children

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has adopted the following definition for street-children: ‘Any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, and so on, has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, directed, and supervised by responsible adults.’ (Williams, 1993: 832).

This definition is developed further by separating such groups into three categories (Plan International, 7):

- **Street-living children:** Children sleeping in public places without their families.
- **Street-working children:** Children who work on the streets during the day but return to their families at night.
- **Children of families on the street:** Children living with their families on the street.

While these categorizations may be helpful, in reality, street-involved children are not a homogenous group and generalizing their experiences can be challenging. Additionally, it is also now recognized that such categories are largely “socially constructed” and even the label “street child” may be perceived as somewhat discriminatory and/or stigmatizing (OHCHR, 2011). In this respect, the term “street children” denies the diversity of children’s experiences, is somewhat victimizing and stigmatizing, and may remove the focus on other marginalized children (Panter-Brick, 2002). New emerging terms as ‘street-active’, ‘street-connected’ or ‘street-involved’ children are increasingly used, and refer to a broader definition of “children for whom the street is a reference point and has a central role in their lives” (Thomas de Benitez, 2007: 9).

One of street children’s main assets is their ability to work and gain income. Most street children are working in the informal sector in a wide range of occupations such as begging, washing windshields, scavenging, rag picking, street-vending etc. At times, street-involved children may manage multiple and diverse jobs throughout a single day in response to shifting demands from morning until night (Thomas de Benítez, 2011). Employment is insecure, limiting the possibilities of planning or projecting oneself into the future. Income is, for the most part, earned on a daily basis and highly fluctuates.

Street-connected youth are also at high-risk to be exploited and trafficked. This includes trafficking for forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation and being forced to beg, work, or engage in criminal activity. This reality is often facilitated by a lack of close family ties. Additionally, being of young age and isolation lead them to be an easy prey for all kinds of influence, manipulation, and abuse, whether by

relatives, strangers from their local communities or by street gang members. Sex is an important aspect of the experiences of street-involved boys, that engage in ‘survival sex, commercial sex, comfort sex, casual sex and romantic relationships, with multiple partners (transvestites, prostitutes, girlfriends, street girls, ‘benefactors’ and gay men) from both within and outside the street world” (Beazley, 2003:190). Additionally, street children are commonly exposed to risks of violence from older street children, and such violence can become their norm (Nada & El Daw, 2010).

Substance Abuse

The abuse of industrial solvents as inhalants, such as toluene-based glue, is commonly seen among street-involved children throughout the world, due to their affordability and widespread availability (Witting et al, 1997). Inhalants abuse, along with alcohol and other illicit drugs, are commonly used by street-involved children as a means of escaping from their harsh reality and often as a means of relieving the sensation of hunger (Pagare et al.,2004; Pogoy & DeGuia, 2008).

Urban poverty: broader than a lack of income

A high proportion of the urban poor live in temporary housing, “slums” or informal settlements, and residents often bear the harsh brunt of the diverse dimensions of poverty. Income is commonly used as the central measure of poverty, mainly through the World Bank’s definition and poverty line of \$1 a day (Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2013). Relying solely on this indicator is problematic as this measure is essentially based on what is needed for bare survival. Focusing on the “minimum food basket” needed to survive fails to take in account differences between countries, provinces, and towns within the same country, as well as attaining a certain quality of life. The measure also overlooks that a key characteristic of urban poverty is the high cost of non-food items and that access to most basic services in the cities of the Global South is generally monetized. For urban poor living in informal settlements, the provision of basic services and infrastructure is often weak or non-existent and financial resources can quickly be depleted by basic aspects of daily life, such as: housing, education, health services, social obligations, transportation, clean water, and sanitation (Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2013).

Beyond this strictly economic aspect, “poverty confronts the individual with a wide range of challenges that go well beyond income deprivation alone” (Pink, 2013: 170). Experiences related to gender, age, social status, location and living conditions, insecurity, discrimination on ethnic grounds and statelessness are often found in street-connected children’s backgrounds. Many live in temporary housing or informal settlements, and residents often bear the harsh brunt of diverse dimensions of poverty that go beyond lack of economic power. As such, the urban poor often live in a context where the provision of basic services and infrastructure is weak or non-existent, and where aspects of daily life drain resources: housing, education, health services, social obligations, transportation to access services or simply to get to work, clean water and sanitation, energy and garbage disposal are all added financial burdens (Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2013).

Likewise, the allure of partaking into market economy and accessing material goods such as smartphones or branded clothes may be a factor for youth to end up in the streets in search of income. In a globalized world with unequal development, children and youth are attracted to city life and aspire to improve their lifestyles and increase consumer power (Punch, 2007).

As shown above, poverty and its related deprivations, combined with increasing inequalities, undoubtedly increase risks of children ending up in the streets and is an important feature of street-involvement. However, poverty is not a sufficient explanation alone, as street-involvement does not affect all poor

children. Other factors are also at play and it is difficult to abstract family environment when examining key causes of street-involvement.

Family environment

Household breakdown is another key factor leading to children's street-involvement. Family changes and disruption, including separation, divorce or a death of a parent, neglect, abuse, domestic violence, and addiction often pushes a child to leave home and search for a better life, or gradually detach physically and emotionally from the home environment (Smeaton, 2005; Thomas de Benitez, 2011). Some research indicates that the challenges in parenting combined with social problems such as alcohol and drug use is also common amongst street-involved families (Bordonaro, 2010; Butler, 2009).

Current research suggests that experiencing violence in the family is the main trigger for street-involvement, and main aspect that distinguishes children that remain in their families from those who separate from them (Patricia, Davey, & Nolan, 2011).

For some, a child's choice of "self-removal" by taking to the streets could be an indication of the child's resiliency. By actively searching to change an unbearable situation by escaping an unhappy household in search for more positive experiences, children are in fact demonstrating acts of agency (Veeran, 2004: 361). In this sense, leaving an unstable home is a form of self-empowerment by choosing autonomous migration. In this view, children abandon their families by venturing to the streets rather than being abandoned (Veale, et al., 2000, cited in Butler, 2009).

In essence, family breakdown is a significant trigger for street-involvement. When youth experience separations, violence, neglect or drug use, many choose to take to the streets. This 'choice' is however severely constrained, as they are choosing "the least bad option" (Reale, 2008: 21). As such, youth with oppressive home lives perceive the streets as the only place they can fulfil basic needs (Schimmel, 2006). However, family violence should be contextualized, and it is too simplistic to "lump" the problem on dysfunctional families that are themselves often experiencing a large amount of structural violence. Street-involved children are merely a symptom of this (Butler, 2009).

Freedom

Seeking adventure, excitement and a sense of freedom are also motivations for children to become street-involved. Some family cultures and societies are demanding on children, assigning them specific roles of being a child in an inflexible social structure. With this in mind, searching for greater freedom to escape strict norms, rules and family obligations may become central in a child's street-involvement. Revolt, adolescent anguish, or youth rebellion can incite youth to remain in the streets (Butler, 2009). Young people are often focused on short-term gratification, and appear to have little concern for the future or longer term plans (Fenelon, et al, 1992, cited in Butler, 2009).

In this sense, they pay little attention to longer-term physical and psychological harm caused by street life (Schimmel, 2006), focusing on immediate needs such as a sense of freedom and fun that they find on the streets. However, for some, street youth are in an illusion of accessing freedom in the streets, and the price they pay on the long run is high (Schimmel, 2006)

Overall, a quest for freedom and adventure certainly influences some children to become street-involved. Similarly, this is often the case in the Global North when it comes to "runaway youth". However, this cannot solely explain street-involvement, as there is a diversity of ways that youth may deal with anguish

and revolt than simply running away, and ending up on the streets is a somewhat extreme expression of revolt. Poverty and family breakdown influences this quest for freedom. Being a victim of multiple poverty-related deprivations, combined with an unhappy or repressive family environment contributes to uprising against formal structures and leads some youth to choose a different path and alternative lifestyle.

Exposure to Pornography and Sexual Violence

The accessibility of pornography to young children has also been an increasing concern with regard to street-based sexual exploitation of children (APLE, 2005: 7). Access to pornographic materials at young ages has been connected to numerous, serious developmental factors including: a premature sexualizing of children's lives and the teaching of "sexual scripts", which normalize violence and abuse as a part of the sexual experience (Graham, 2005). In addition to this, research in this area has shown a direct connection between the consumption of pornography by young people and sexual violence and rape—including rape within marriage and gang rape (Graham, 2005; APLE, 2005). A 2003 study conducted by Child Welfare Group in four major areas in Cambodia (Phnom Penh, Kampong Som, Siem Reap, and Kampong Cham) found that 61.7% of boys and 38.5% of girls indicating they have viewed some type of pornographic material (Child Welfare Group, 2003). This study found that, among those children who were viewing pornography, 36% depicted group sex, 35% depicted violence, 19% depicted bestiality, and another 15% was child pornography (2003). The most common place where minors reported viewing pornography was in public coffee shops and private homes and the prevalence of minors viewing porn was found to be almost twice as common in Phnom Penh, compared with provincial areas. A survey among 230 video street vendors in Phnom Penh found that nearly 70% of vendors surveyed sold pornography—49% of which was openly on display in their shop or stand (2003).

Dr. Graham Fordham, in a 2005 study on gender-based violence in Kandal Steung district in Cambodia found a significantly higher percentage of children who have been exposed to pornography at extremely young ages. In this study, only 17.8% of boys and 15.5% girls had NOT encountered pornography. Further, the mean age at which children had encountered pornography was 13.2 years of age with a significant percentage encountering pornography substantially younger than 12 years of age (Fordham, 2005). The research found that easy access to pornography was likely to be driving the development of harmful masculine identities in which violent and abusive sexual scripts were normalized as appropriate ways of relating sexually to others (2005). In view of this, it should be noted that now, ten years later, the modern technological environment continues to develop exponentially and at a rapid pace, making smartphones, the internet, and thus graphic pornography more available than when Fordham's study was initially published.

Research is beginning to demonstrate the connection between this ready availability of pornography and child sexual exploitation (CSE). Perpetrators of CSE often use adult pornography to groom their victims for sexual exploitation. Similarly, the purchasers of children often act out what they have viewed in pornographic films with child prostitutes and pimps will also use such films to instruct children on how to behave during sex with their clients (Peters, 2009; Fordham, 2005). Yet, as the availability and accessibility of adult hardcore pornography has continued to expand on the Internet and elsewhere, both government and private entities have commonly turned a blind eye to this phenomenon and its impact on their societies (Peters, 2009).

The exposure of children to sexual violence is also an important consideration in this conversation. Glenn Miles (2005) explores the perception of and exposure to various forms of sexual and physical violence among 1,314 male and female school children throughout Cambodia. This study found it disturbingly

high percentage of girls and an even higher percentage of boys who say they know children who have been raped. Beyond this, 21.4% of girls and 23.5% boys cited they had witnessed the rape of a child by an adult (Miles, 2005). This reality, coupled with the increasing availability of exposure to pornographic materials among school children is a significant concern for child development (Fordham, 2005). While much of the data in existence on this topic comes from Cambodia, it can perhaps provide a helpful context of information, as we explore this area of vulnerability in neighboring Thailand. Much more research is still needed, however, across the region in this area.

The Neglect of Male Vulnerability

Most discussions held within media circles often reinforce this gender exclusive understanding of vulnerability, highlighting only female victimization, while often obscuring the plight of male victims, especially male children (Jones, 1149: 2010). Traditionally, this narrative often explicitly describes instances in which men enslave and sexually abuse “women and girls” and typically dichotomizes males and females as “predator” and “prey” (2010: 1144), often blurring the concepts of sexual exploitation and misogyny. Such expressions of male dominance and invulnerability often hide the reality that males are also vulnerable to abuse and exploitation (2010: 1145). Samuel Jones, in an article in the Utah Law Review suggests, “to some extent, men and boys have become the victims of this media driven, socially constructed, conception of maleness” (2010: 1145). The focus of the discussion on vulnerability, exploitation, and violence then becomes solely on women as the victims of male violence. Thus, when research is conducted on males who are exploited and/or involved in the sex trade industry, this assumption of female vulnerability and male resilience is often laid as a foundation.

In a review of 166 scholarly articles on the global sex industry, 84% exclusively discussed female sex workers and made no mention of males. When males were mentioned, they were ascribed, or presumed to have, significantly more agency than females (Dennis, 2008). Research often views males in the sex industry as liabilities for sexual health, rather than vulnerable human beings that can be damaged (Graham, 2007). In addressing female sex workers, issues of gender-based violence, emotions/family support and a variety of other social vulnerabilities are commonly addressed. On the other hand, when studies address male sex workers, they predominantly address issues of HIV/AIDS and sexual orientation (Dennis, 2008: 11).

Asquith and Turner, in a 2008 report commissioned by the Oak foundation, describe a “screaming silence” about the needs of male victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking. They cited that “where boys are referred to, this is usually in reference to reasons other than sexual exploitation, such as child labor or begging...” However, among what research has been done on the issue, data continues to demonstrate that sexual exploitation and trafficking of males is a pervasive issue. In some countries, such as Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, instances of abuse and sexual exploitation committed against boys is cited to far outweigh that which is committed against girls--with some studies suggesting up to 90% of sexual exploitation cases in Sri Lanka (Frederick, ECPAT, 2008).

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Boys¹ (CSEB)

Over the past 10 years, the commercial sexual exploitation of children has gained much needed attention around the globe. However, as with the discussion of abuse and human trafficking in general, most of this discussion has centered on young women and adolescent girls. What little attention that has been

¹ The term “boys” is used here to describe all male respondents. This is not meant to infantilize males over the age of

afforded to boys often identifies them as exploiters, pimps, and buyers of sex or as active and willing participants in sex work, not as victims or survivors of exploitation (ECPAT, 2010). As a result of this general lack of information and awareness about the reality of male vulnerability, social service providers are often ill equipped to meet the needs of male victims of violence, sexual abuse, and exploitation. A recent report from the US Department of State notes, “around the world, the identification and provision of adequate social services for male victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking has remained a continuous challenge” (US Department of State, 2013: 1).

A report released by ECPAT USA (2010) entitled, "...And Boys, Too" draws attention to this phenomenon in which discussions of boys as victims or survivors of CSEC is frequently appended to a discussion about commercially sexually exploited girls in the form of a footnote which usually reads, as their title suggests, "...and boys, too". This report includes a desk review among 40 key service providers and youth agencies in the United States. Most significantly, this review reveals that the scope of the commercial sexual exploitation of boys (CSEB) is vastly underestimated and cites a strong consensus among service providers that a majority CSEB cases commonly go unreported--a reality that poses a significant risk to the health and lives of young males (ECPAT, 2010: 3). In accordance with data on the male victims of sexual abuse, this paper cites that the overall mental, physical, and emotional health outcomes of boys who have been victims of CSE were dismal and provided increased chances of further sexual assault at the hands of a stranger. In addition, data from desk reviews and key informants indicate exceedingly high rates of alcohol and the usage of illicit drugs among boys who have been victims of CSE (2010: 8).

In South Asia, a very similar reality is true. UNICEF IRC indicates boys received significantly less legal protection from sexual abuse and exploitation and less access to service for victims than girls. In some cases, legislation protects only girls and women and excludes boys and men (UNICEF, 2010). In Sri Lanka, as much as 90% of the estimated 20,000-30,000 child prostitutes in the country are boys, many of whom can be pre-ordered to be waiting for foreign pedophiles upon their arrival in country (Frederick, 2010; UNICEF, 2010). Many of these young boys are filmed for child pornography, which can be circulated the world-over. In the United States, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) estimates that boys are depicted in over 50% of all the child pornography that it seizes (UNICEF, 2010).

Three ECPAT studies in South Asia show differences in the way boys are used:

- A small study of the exploitation of boys in prostitution in Hyderabad (India) reported few pimps and largely female customers (Akula, 2006).
- In Lahore and Peshawar (Pakistan) researchers described boys having sex with older men in long-term relationships that were not always based on money (Mohammed & Zafar, 2006).
- The exploitation of boys in prostitution in Bangladesh was found to be a traditional practice, based in hotels, in homes and on the street. Pimps controlled the boys through fear and violence. (Ali & Sarkar, 2006)

CSEC in Broader Asia / SE Asia

In Asian societies, issues of male sexual abuse have also been given little attention. Boys are assumed to be capable of protecting themselves and the existence of male sexual abuse and even male-to-male sexuality is often ignored or denied. This traditional narrative seems to preclude that males are not at risk of abuse or exploitation (Frederick, 2010: 6). Thus, societies are less vigilant, cases of abuse are less likely to be reported, and boys may be placed at greater risk of abuse and/or exploitation. These prevalent conceptions of male invulnerability further complicate the issue of male exploitation and abuse because they reinforce the idea that males are “stronger” and thus more psychologically resilient, able to readily protect themselves, and more easily recover from trauma than adolescent girls (2010:15).

Asia, along with Central and South America, is cited to the highest rates of child sexual exploitation in the world (UNICEF, 2001; Ward, 2004). In Cambodia, the commercial sexual exploitation of children is understood to occur within one of two categories. The first of these is establishment-based sexual exploitation, which often occurs in brothels, beer gardens, KTV, and massage establishments (APLE, 2006). This has significantly reduced for girls in the past few years except in KTV bars where 9% were found to be under 18 years (IJM, 2013). Secondly, there is street-based or opportunistic sexual exploitation, which is usually facilitated personally by a sex offender or an intermediary, who often approaches children directly on the streets, or in other public areas for the purpose of starting a relationship with the child which will ultimately lead to sexual abuse (2006: 4). This second type of exploitation is often much more difficult to monitor as the children and their abuses are not necessarily in a fixed location.

In a 2006 study by Action Pour Les Enfants (APLE) interviews were conducted in Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville, Cambodia with 26 child victims of street-based sexual exploitation as well as survey among civil-society personnel who were experienced in working with such groups of vulnerable children. The majority of the children interviewed in the sampling (19 of the 26) were male, reflecting existing APLE data that 80% of child victims of street-based sexual exploitation are male. The study found similar themes among victims of street-based CSE as was found in the 2008 study by Alastair Hilton, et al on child sexual abuse in Cambodia. These common themes included: stressors in the family environment, low-level family incomes, no education or low level education, a street working or street living lifestyle, and peers engaging in similar high-risk behavior (2006: 2). The research uncovered a number of sophisticated grooming techniques employed by pedophiles to gain access to children on the streets. It was commonly found that the majority of children were unaware that the relationship with their abuser was ultimately leading to a sexual encounter (2006). The research found that a majority of sexually exploited children (two-thirds) had sex to earn money. Additionally, drug abuse was found to be common among victims, with 70% reporting to have already been using drugs before the time that they were first sexually exploited. Another notable finding was that respondents were found to show little regard for personal health issues (condom usage) despite some knowledge of the risks of sexually transmitted diseases (2006: 2).

Over the past three years, Love146 has conducted a series of baseline studies, which have explored the often hidden vulnerabilities of boys and young men to violence and sexual exploitation throughout the Philippines, Cambodia, and Thailand. In Cambodia, two studies, in particular, have focused on such vulnerabilities of male masseurs in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Overall, violence and sexual abuse were found to be a common theme for young males working in either type of establishment. Respondents from mixed gender massage establishments were found to report significantly lower occurrences of sexual intercourse with clients; however, were far more likely to have been forced to have sex against their wishes (Miles & Davis, 2012). This study, conducted in Phnom Penh (2011), uncovered a significant lack of employable skills and job training which seems to be a contributing factor to the vulnerability of young males to sexual exploitation (Miles & Blanch, 2011: 3-4). Later studies in this series, conducted in Metro-Manila, Philippines and Chiang Mai, Thailand, establish a significant connection between low wages and a significant reliance upon tips, which create a context in which the provision of sexual services is often obligatory in order to receive a fair wage (Davis & Miles, 2012; Davis, Glotfelty, & Miles, 2013).

Methodology

Research Sampling

This study employs both purposive and “snowballing” (chain-referral) sampling methodologies to conduct 55 semi-structured interviews among street-involved children and youth in Chiang Mai, Thailand between March and May of 2015. The interviews include 28 boys, 25 girls, and two transgender youth living and/or working on the streets of Chiang Mai, Thailand. In addition to information from field interviews, the study provides a desk review on experiences faced by street-connected children and youth globally and in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on the often-unseen vulnerabilities of street-involved boys.

The interviews were conducted by five social work professionals from the Chiang Mai-based NGO, Urban Light, that works with sexually exploited boys and young males engaged in the sex industry. This NGO has been operational for five years and runs a drop in center, as well as educational, housing, and health programs. Its team undertakes regular night and day outreach to provide prevention and educational material. The majority of data collection for this study occurred during these outreach times.

Meetings were held with seven key informants in Chiang Mai and in Bangkok, working in child protection, in particular, commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), and anti-trafficking initiatives. The aim of these meetings was to gain further understanding of the context and experiences of street-based youth and the work already being done in Chiang Mai to support street-involved youth. As a part of this initial fieldwork, a mapping was conducted with the data collection team within and around the Chiang Mai city area. This was compared with existing mapping data held by Urban Light, and then used to define locations or sectors of the city in which interviews should be conducted.

Inclusion Criteria

This study required six key criteria for inclusion in the study’s sampling. For inclusion, all respondents needed to be:

1. Street-working or street-living girls or boys
2. Aged between 10 and 24 years old
3. Not living in a residential structure (NGO or government) nor benefiting from close case management from any social service provider
4. Freely consenting to participate
5. Not under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of the interview
6. Having no identified risk of harm by participation in the interview.

The age range of participants was a subject of discussion; in particular in respect to whether the research should solely focus on the experiences of minors or also include young adults’ accounts. The team agreed that vulnerabilities do not inexplicably disappear when one turns 18 years old. Furthermore, the research team decided that including older youth’s experiences would add value to the study, as they may have been on the streets for longer and had more experience of street life. This research accordingly encompasses, in addition to children and adolescents, the responses of youth aged up to 24 years old, using the United Nation’s broad understanding of youth.² For the ease of reading, this paper will interchangeably use the terms “children” and “youth”, instead of systematically referring to “children and

² UNDESA. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf> [accessed 20 July 2015].

youth”. Youth in residential care and those closely supported by service providers were purposely excluded from this research, as the aim was to undercover the realities of those presently on the streets and not benefiting from any consistent external support.

Ethical Considerations

All interviews in this study were conducted in the Thai language by social workers from Urban Light. Prior to beginning interviews, the teams of social workers were trained in the study’s methodology, as well as given ethical training for research with vulnerable people groups using the “UNIAP Ethical Guidelines for Human-Trafficking Research” (2009). The trainings focused on interviewing skills, handling any potential disclosures of abuse, and ensuring staff had access to adequate information on legal and social protection services for referral of respondents if needed.

Prior to each interview, social workers used child-friendly language to describe the research and its aims and sought to establish rapport with potential respondents. During this time, potential respondents were given information concerning the research and its purpose as well as the personal and sensitive nature of the interview, and the types of questions to be asked. After the study’s purpose and objectives were explained, along with the nature and extent of the questions to be asked, respondents could choose if they desired to complete the survey or not. If the child agreed to participate in the survey, he/she was given assurance of the study’s confidentiality and anonymity, as well as the respondent’s right to choose not to answer any question or stop the survey at any time. In addition, respondents were reminded that their honest answers were greatly appreciated, and if at any time they felt uncomfortable – the interviewers would prefer to have no answer at all, rather than an answer that was inaccurate.

In order to make provision for younger children, surveys were designed to be age-contingent. After careful consideration of the needs and context of younger street-involved children and consulting with local child specialists, survey questions were structured in such a way so that certain sections of the survey could be skipped for street-involved children under the age of 12. However, if a child under the age of 12 disclosed sexual intercourse or sexual abuse, and was comfortable talking about the subject, interviewers were instructed to continue through the full set of questions as they would with a respondent over the age of 12, at their (and the child’s) discretion.

Furthermore, special considerations were made with respect to the potential of reactivating emotions or triggering trauma within children and young people who had previous experiences of abuse. It was important for social workers to be able to assess the respondent’s thoughts and feelings during interviews and to be willing to stop the interview if continuing was believed to not be in the respondent’s best interest (Laws & Man, 2014). Thus, the research team chose to utilize only experienced staff in conducting field interviews as a means of mitigating these potential risks. Furthermore, respondents were able to choose the gender of the interviewer, or a specific interviewer for those who already were familiar with certain members of the interview team.

Due to nature of the topic, it was unreasonable to obtain legal guardian's prior consent to interviews. Consequently, special attention was placed on training staff that conducted interviews on how to communicate with minors, ensure that respondents understood their full rights to participate or not, abstain from answering a question, and that confidentiality was fully guaranteed.

Data Gathering

Interviews were carried out in Thai, by a team of five staff members comprised of social workers, outreach workers and case managers from the NGO. They were all accustomed to working with vulnerable youth and engaging in discussions of a sensitive nature. The interviews aimed to take place as a conversation rather than in a strictly formal fashion. A safe place ensuring confidentiality was always secured for all interviews. Participants were not compensated, but offered snacks during the interview. If applicable, public transportation costs for pre-scheduled interviews were reimbursed.

Interviews took place at various times throughout the day and night, and within different locations. When possible, interviews were conducted at the NGO's drop in center, but mostly; interviews were conducted on the streets or in cafés. Interviewers worked in pairs of one female and one male staff member, to enable respondents to choose whom they preferred to talk to. A majority of respondents in this study were unknown to interviewers. Exploring new locations required careful preparation on how to best approach the children in a sensitive and discreet manner, as building trust and rapport is a key first step before commencing an interview (Laws & Mann, 2006).

Following data gathering, completed survey forms were collected and individual debriefings were held with each staff member involved. These debriefing were essential to assess the social worker's own feelings about the case that they had just heard, mitigating the risk of potential secondary trauma. Regarding the risk of secondary trauma, this risk is known to decrease it is acknowledged, and people are given appropriate time and space to share, take distance, and process their emotions (SVRI, 2015). The debriefing sessions also aimed to ensure that the child was in a stable psychological state at the end of the interview and had received appropriate referral to service providers for support, if needed. The individual meetings were also key moments to transcribe quotes, review main findings with interviewers, and collect first-hand interviewer's impressions and feedback.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire used for this study was quite large and was comprised of 86 questions (excluding numerous sub questions). Questions were a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions covering a variety of topics surrounding the life and context of street-involved boys including: demographics, social relationships, personal and family finances, social and emotional feelings, stigma and discrimination, sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC), sexual health, violence, income generation, and future planning. The instrument was designed in a way to gradually encourage respondents to share their experiences, starting with relatively simple and factual questions and progressed towards more sensitive and personal topics.

The questions used for this study were adapted from previous research instruments used to gather holistic baselines of information from street-involved children in Sihanoukville, Cambodia and Manila, Philippines as well as similar instruments used to explore the vulnerabilities of young male entertainment workers in Cambodia, The Philippines, and Thailand. In adapting the questionnaire for Thai street-involved children, the research team worked with child rights specialists and specialists from the implementing organization to ensure that questions were appropriate to be asked to young children with in this particular social and cultural context.

The questionnaire was reviewed with the team and tested prior to its wider use. It was translated into Thai from English, first by an external translator, then adapted and carefully readjusted by the team of interviewers from Urban Light. This process was crucial, as the staff's knowledge and experiences with

street-based youth, familiarity with language used on the streets, and their input on specific areas of youth's lives was crucial and invaluable. This participative process also enabled an increased ownership of the questionnaire and of the research project by the team and increased self-confidence prior to interviews. Reviewing the instrument multiple times with the team of interviewers was additionally key to ensure clarity, testing relevance, order of questions, and levels of comfort among the interviewers, whilst specifically taking in account cultural and linguistic subtleties unknown to the research coordinators that were not Thai.

Data Analysis

A former social worker of the NGO ensured translation of all responses to English. This was of significant added value, as having a single, experienced, and issue-sensitive translator ensured coherence, use of accurate wording and a solid understanding of the nuances within the answers. A mixed methods approach, both quantitative and qualitative, were used during the data interpretation. The data was entered in the IBM SPSS software that is used for statistical analysis. The qualitative answers were also faithfully transcribed. On open-ended questions, a qualitative approach was used to analyze the data, whereby the lead researcher systematically categorized answers and identified common emerging groups and themes. Questions were specifically cross-tabulated for this paper to further understand the experiences of violence amongst the respondents. Data is presented with emphasis on gender-disaggregated information, as a main focus of this paper is uncovering boys' and girls' differences and commonalities in respect to violence on the streets.

Limitations

Validity of responses: A limitation of this study may pertain to the veracity of the collected responses. Some youth were interviewed by a social worker they already knew, and this could have been favorable or not favorable depending on the specific situation. Practically speaking, in some cases this connection may enable youth to express themselves freely, with little fear of judgment stemming from their trustful relationship with the interviewer. For others, however, this could have limited discussions as the respondent may not want to reveal everything about himself/herself to someone he/she has an on-going relationship with. For example, he/she may feel embarrassed, fear disappointing the staff member, or perceive that what he/she reveals may have consequences on the future of their relationship or on the services from which he/she is benefitting.

Potential professional bias: Purposive sampling contains risks of leading to a certain researcher bias. The interview team was more accustomed to working with males engaged in commercial sex. They thus knew where to go to find this group and this may have been reflected in high rates of disclosed sex work amongst male respondents.

Furthermore, lack of experience in working with girls when discussing sensitive topics such as sexual experiences may also have led to less disclosure of abuse amongst female respondents. Post-interviews debriefings may also have been distorted, as staff's perceptions, interpretations and recollections of interviews with boys and girls may vary considering their prior professional experience solely with boys. Likewise, the team already knew a minority of the male respondents, but knew none of the female participants. This may have influenced the results and limited girls' honest answers, as a previous relationship of trust or a recommendation by a peer was lacking. However, it may on the contrary have favored more open responses, as the girls' did not have much at stake, as it is likely that they would never meet the interviewer following the interview.

Scope of study: The research was carried out in a limited scope and locations. The data collected during the fieldwork does not intend to draw general conclusions on all street-connected children globally, but to provide a snapshot of the situation in Chiang Mai at a given time.

Challenges

Political context: A challenge upon beginning fieldwork was an apparent lack of street-based children in the streets of Chiang Mai. This is a dramatic change from the numbers of street-involved children observed three months prior to starting fieldwork for this study. Some background on Thailand's current political situation may be important to mention here. After years of political turmoil, a military coup occurred in May 2014, and a military junta took over the country. Though Thai government has never specifically taken the plight of street children to heart, the junta has further enforced harsh policies.

Informants and respondents, when asked, explained that several factors may explain the apparent lack of street-based children in the streets of Chiang Mai: a harder policy in respect to “deviant” groups, manifested by authorities recently “cleaning up” the city center’s streets. Timing of the study may also have influenced outcomes. The study took place during the period of “Songkran”, a Thai festival that attracts many visitors, foreign and Thai, to Chiang Mai, well known for its vibrant celebrations during this period. Furthermore, NGO workers mentioned street-based youth are often linked to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation circles in Chiang Mai. A key informant stated that two prominent traffickers had recently been arrested, and circles of children in their “custody” had disappeared following these arrests. Another informant stated that many children and youth had pre-emptively migrated to neighboring provinces, out of fear of arrests.

These arrests occurred in a context whereby Thailand is increasingly criticized for its lack of effort to combat human trafficking, notably due to the last US-led and widely disseminated “Trafficking in Persons” (TIP) yearly report. This report provides a description of human trafficking globally, and discusses the government's' efforts to tackle the problem (US State Department, 2014). The TIP report classifies countries from “Tier 1” to “Tier 3” according to government’s determination to combat the issue as well as compliance with the US’ Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Classifying a country as a “Tier 3”, which is the lowest category, has real implications in terms of international funding and adding political pressure on authorities. The downgrading of Thailand to a “Tier 3” country in 2014 has thus led to increased strain by donors and foreign governments on Thai authorities to increase efforts to combat human trafficking, and has been responsible for a number of Thai programs losing funding. This has pressured Thai authorities to further display their commitment towards fighting human trafficking in hopes of being upgraded to a “Tier 2” country in next year’s report.

Partnership: A key and unexpected challenge encountered was the difficulty to find additional partner organizations. From the beginning of fieldwork, the research team’s initial desire was to complete this research with several different partners so as to enhance collaboration and appropriation of results for the NGO community in Chiang Mai as a whole, and potentially inform programmed of different organizations. Despite contacting a variety of organizations claiming to work with street-connected youth, the research team was unable to rely on any other organization. In addition to a somewhat lack of formal coordination between partners and obvious donor competition, NGOs seemed guarded in their interactions and said they lacked the resources to participate in such a survey. Informants also communicated that many organizations had been approached in the past by foreign researchers with doubtful professional qualifications that collected data, took credit for ideas that were not their own, and did not share findings.

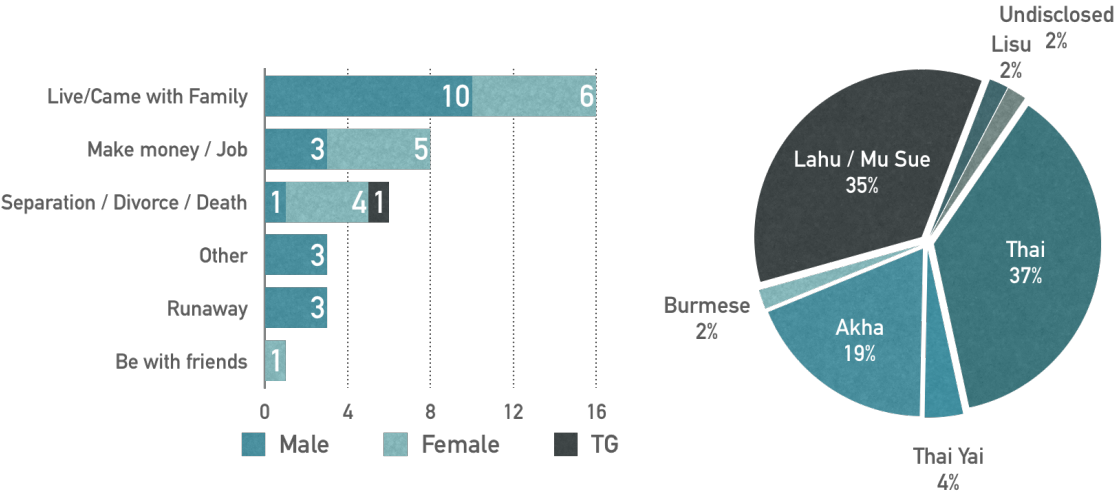
Results

Demographics:

Ages: The ages of the 55 street-involved children interviewed in Chiang Mai range from 11 to 24 years of age. Among them are 28 males (51%), 25 are females (45%), and two identifying as “ladyboys” or transgender (4%). All respondents in this study fall within the UN definition of youth (ages 15-24), with the majority of respondents (63%) falling below the age of 18. Among those falling under the age of 18, 18 respondents were female and 17 were male.

Education: Considering only respondents aged 18 years and younger, 18 children (47%) cite they are currently enrolled in school, while 20 (53%) cite that they are not. Among those out of school, six are boys and 14 are girls. Those citing that they were not currently enrolled in school were asked how long they had been out of school. While 14% cite attending school earlier in the year, and 18% cite attending school last year, nearly half (45%) cite that they have been out of school for longer than one year, and 23% of street-involved children cite never having attended school in their lives.

Ethnicity and Migration: Only slightly more than one third of respondents (37%) identify ethnically as Thai. The majority of respondents identify as a variety of Thai ethnic minority groups (61%) and one respondent identifies as Burmese (2%). Seventy-one percent (71%) of respondents cite migration to Chiang Mai from other Thai provinces, mainly in Northern Thailand. No major differences between girls and boys’ ethnicity or experiences of migration are notable. A significant number of respondents cite that they had migrated with their families (43%). Others migrated to gain income or find a job (22%), because of family troubles (24%), which includes separation of parents, a death, or running away from a difficult family environment. One cites migration to Chiang Mai to be with her friends.



Shelter and Living Arrangements: Nearly one-in-six-children (17%) live on the street. The majority of those living on the streets were male (7 people) and two were female. The 7 males living on the streets represent nearly one third of all males in the study. Two thirds of respondents are minors, while one third are youth (aged 18 to 24 years of age).

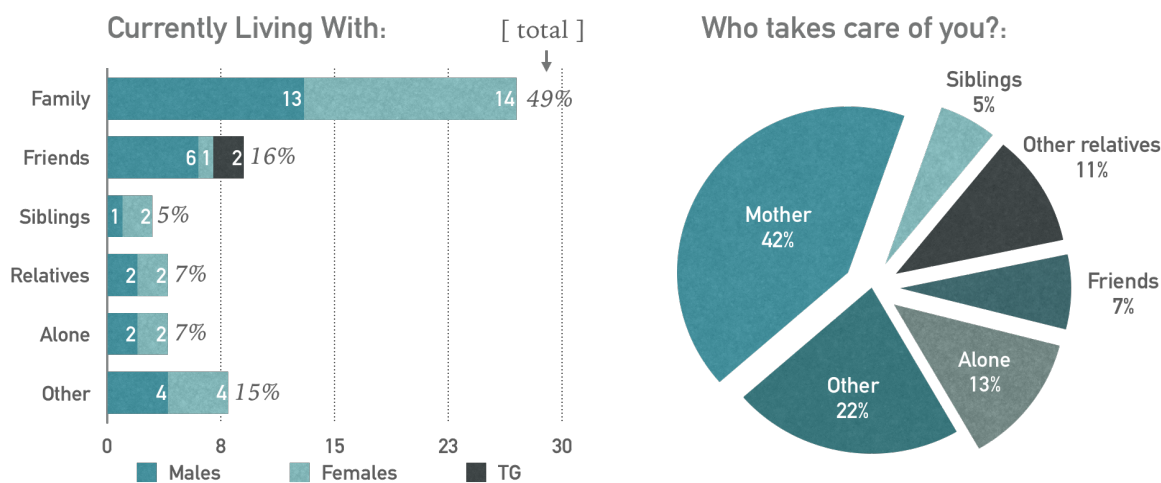
Respondents were asked what their house was like. The majority of respondents 56% cite that they were their families rent the current place in which they are living. This includes living in apartments and single room rentals within a larger house and dormitory style rentals. To a lesser extent, 22% cite living in a house that is not rented. This includes several respondents who have build houses or shelters on rented land, as well as multi-family housing. Sixteen percent (16%) cite living directly on the streets (one of which cites staying in a condemned building). Two people or 4% cite staying in a daily rental house. This is a particularly unstable situation as depending on daily earnings. If enough money is earned throughout the day, they will have a place to stay at night, however if they do not have money, they will often be forced to sleep on the streets.

A majority of girls (60%), 46% of boys, and both transgender respondents (100%) cite that they do not feel safe in their immediate environment. The main threats they identify are drug users, thieves, living conditions, general distrusts of people around them, police, older teenagers or peers, and sexual and verbal violence.

One third of respondents cite alcohol and drug use of others as being a main source of insecurity, including older teenagers and adults, as well as those trying to pressure them into using substances as a primary source of insecurity. One street-working girl, age 11, cites: “Drunk people come and knock on my door.” A street-working boy, age 17, cites of his community: “I live in a bad area where people use drugs and alcohol”. Risks of theft are also main reasons of insecurity both for girls and boys. Girls seem specially affected by poor living conditions. “I have no safe place to stay” cites one street-living girl, age 17. Another street-working girl, age 13, cites: “My home is far away and not developed”.

An on-going and general mistrust and sense of insecurity of their environment is also expressed both by street-working and by street-living respondents. Once street-working boy, age 14 cites: “I’m afraid of yelling and being hurt by other people”.

Relationships



Nearly half of all respondents (49% or 27 youth) cite living with a parent or parents. Among this 49%, 13 are male and 14 are female. Sixteen percent (9 youth) of respondents cite living with friends. The majority of this group (66% or 6 people) is male, one is female, and both transgender respondents fall within this group. Four respondents, or 7% cite living with relatives, another 7% cite living by themselves, and 5% cite living with siblings. Lastly, 15% (8 people) cite various other living arrangements. Among

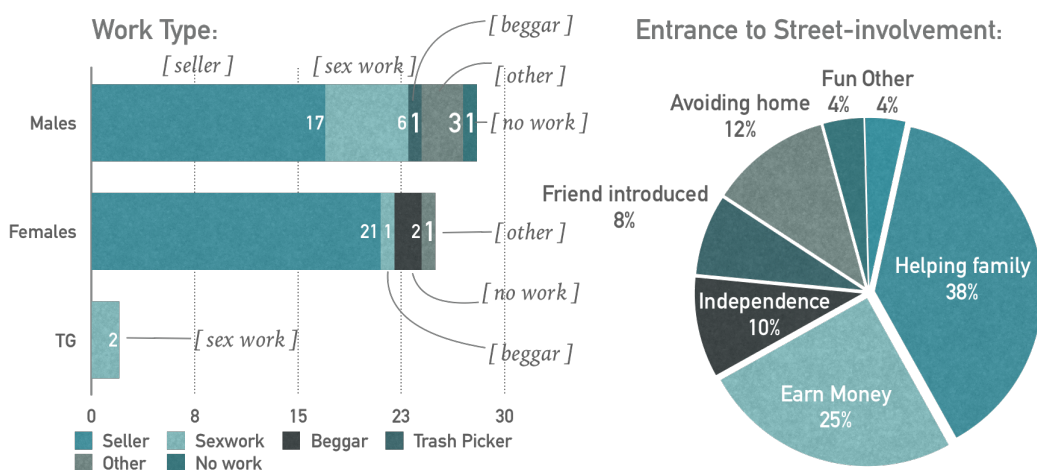
those that cite living with other people, 92% cite that they like living with those people, and the remaining 8% cite that they do not.

Beyond those who respondents were living with, they were asked about who specifically takes care of them on a regular basis. The largest portion of respondents (42%) cited being taken care of by a mother. Thirteen percent (7 people) cite that they have no one to take care of them and generally take care of themselves. Eleven percent (6 people) cites being taken care of by other relatives. Seven percent (4 youth) cite being taken care of by friends and nearly one in for cite to variety of other arrangements.

Street Work

Work type: A strong majority of respondents in this study, or 69% (38 youth) cite engagement in work as street vendors of a variety of items (i.e. peanuts, flowers, toys or fruit). Beyond this, nine people or 16% cite engagement in sex work to earn income. Among the nine are six males, one female, and both transgender respondents. To a lesser extent, begging is mentioned by two females (4% of the sampling), and one male cites picking through trash to find recyclables and earn income. Other forms of work mentioned included assisting a vendor at a market and helping at a construction site.

Entrance to Street-work: Street involved children were asked how they came to be involved in their particular form of street work. The majority of respondents 38% (10 males and 10 females) cite entering into Street involvement as a means of helping their families. Twenty-five percent of respondents (13 people) cite entering into street for the purpose of earning personal income. The majority of this group is female (10 females, two males, and one transgender). Beyond this, 12% cite entering into Street involvement as a means of avoiding a difficult home environment. Ten percent (5 people) cite entering into street work because it gave them ‘independence’. Those citing independence are mostly male (four males and one female). To a lesser extent, eight percent (four people) cite coming in the street work after a friend introduced it to them, 2 people cite coming into street work because they found it to be fun.



Views on street work: Twenty-nine percent of respondents cite that they do not like their work on the streets. Among this group, 53% are male, 33% are female, and both transgender respondents are within this group. Common reasons given for disliking work include dangers within their community, social shame and stigma, and unstable income. The majority of respondents (69%), however, cite that they do like their work on the streets. Half of all respondents (50%) cite that they like their work because of the money that they are able to earn. To a lesser extent, 13% cite that their work is easy and thus they like it.

Eight percent (3 people) cite that their work is 'fun'. Beyond this, common reasons for liking work include, being able to help their family, being able to socialize, learning new skills, and independence.

Time spent in street-work: Respondents were asked about the average amount of time that they spend working on the streets in one day. The mean of all working hours reported was 6.36 hours the shortest amount of time being two hours and the longest being 20 hours. Only three respondents report working longer than 11 hours. All three of these are male; one male, age 16, works as a sex worker, and two males, ages 12 and 19, cite selling various items on the streets.

The mean number of years cited by respondents 6.2 years spent in street work, the shortest period time being only a few days and the longest being 19 years. Nearly half of all respondents 49% cite spending between one and four years in street work. Only five respondents (9%) cite spending less than one year in street-work. Lastly 42% of respondents cite spending five or more years in street work. There are no notable differences between street-working males, females, and transgender respondents.

Earnings: The vast majority of respondents (61%) cite giving at least some of their income to someone else, with 21% giving all of their income to someone else. Lastly, 38% (20 people) cite keeping all of their earnings for themselves. However, it should be understood that being 'self sufficient' financially means that the child is not a burden on the family. Among those giving their earnings to someone else, 72% cite giving earnings to a family member. To lesser extent, 9% cite sharing earnings with a friend and 6% (two people) sharing earnings with a partner. Beyond this, 13% mention a variety of different individuals with whom they share their earnings who are not specifically stated as a friend, family member, or partner.

Stigma and Discrimination

Respondents were asked how they believed people on the streets thought about them as street-involved children. They were asked this question with regard to Thai people and also with regard to foreigners who see them on the streets. Overall, Street involved youth perceived Thai people to have notably more negative perceptions of them, in comparison with foreigners.

Regarding Thai people, 64% of participants cite feeling that the Thai people looked down on them or had feelings of disdain. Other various negative emotions mentioned include: having sympathy or pity on streets-involved youth (9% or four people), as well as themes of hatred, fear, and distrust (9% or four people). To a lesser extent, some mentioned positive feelings from Thai people. Three children (7%) felt the Thai people viewed them as "hard-working" and 2% (one person) cites being viewed with a mixture of both positive and negative emotions. With regard to foreigners, nearly one-third of children (29% or eight people) feel that foreigners feel sympathetic towards them. Another 18% (five people) cite foreigners feeling the desire to support or help people on the streets. And equal amount five people are 18% cite foreigners looking down on them or having feelings of disdain to a lesser extent seven percent (5 people) cite that foreigners want to use or take advantage of the street-involved people. And another seven percent (2 people) cite foreigners having vague positive feelings toward street-involved youth.

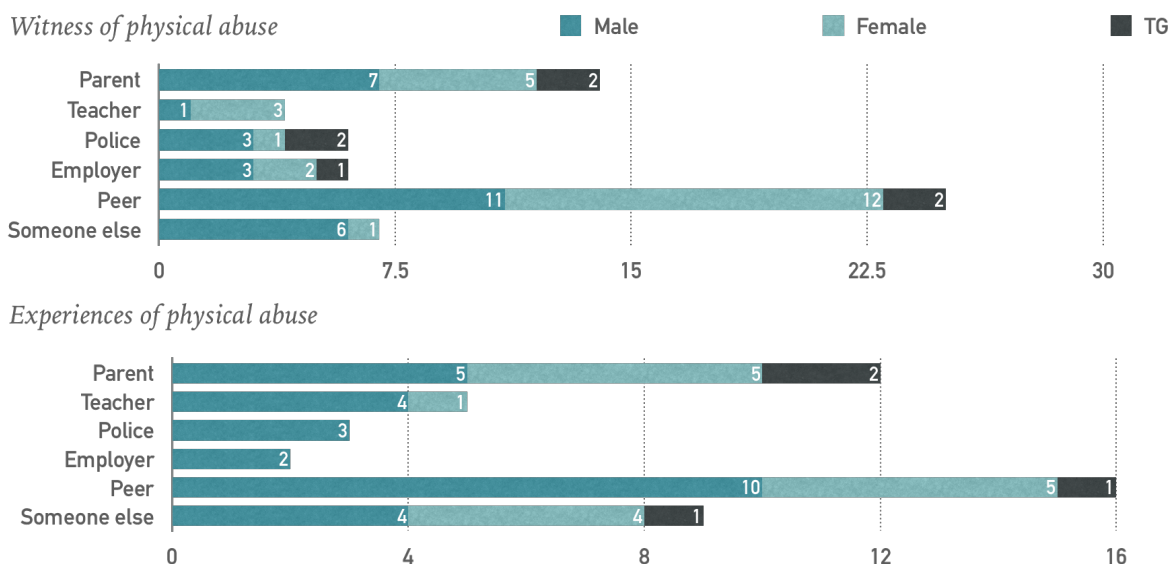
Respondents were asked if there is anyone on the streets who treated them badly. A total of 33 respondents or 60% stated that there are such persons on the street. 60% of males, 40% of females, and both transgender persons mention specific persons on the streets to treat them badly. Among those persons who are cited to be treating respondents badly, peers are most commonly mentioned (32% or 10 people). Beyond this, family members are mentioned by 16% (or 5 people) as well as four people mentioning business owners (13%) and four people mentioning being treated badly by their customers (13%). To lesser extent, drug users and police are mentioned by one person each (3%).

Physical Violence

A series of questions was asked in order to explore the kinds of violence experienced by street-involved youth within their communities and during their work on the streets. In order to make these questions seem less abrasive, respondents were first asked about times in which they have witnessed other street-involved youth receiving violence. They were asked about violence coming from five key figures: parents, teachers, police, employers, and other children. Following these questions, respondents were asked about their own personal experience of physical violence from the same five key figures.

The most common form of violence witnessed both by girls and boys comes from peers, with 25 participants, 11 boys (41%), 12 girls (48%) and both transgender respondents stating that they had witnessed peer violence. Witnessing parental violence is mentioned by 26% of respondents. Within this group are seven males (26%), five girls (20%), and both transgender respondents (100%). Following this, six boys (22%) and one girl (4%) mentioned witnessing violence by “someone else”. These included: relatives, staff from a juvenile center, and strangers that wanted to fight. Three boys (11% of group), two girls (8% of group) and one transgender (50% of group) had witnessed violence by an employer. Three girls (12%) and one boy (4%) had witnessed violence from a teacher, and police violence is mentioned by three boys (12%), one girl (4%), and both transgender respondents.

Living on the street is an additional risk factor and increases vulnerability to violence: seven out of the nine street-living boys stated they had witnessed violence, mainly beatings, from other youth.



Considering experiences of physical violence, peers are cited to be the primary perpetrators of direct physical violence, especially for boys. More than one-third of boys (37% or 10) and one-fifth of girls (20% or 5) cite experiences of physical violence peers. Violence from parents is the second more common source of violence, and seems to occur in similar proportions for both boys and girls (19% and 20%, respectively). This includes beating, hitting with a stick or with an object, slapping, and pushing.

While more data is needed before any clear generalization can be made, boys seem to be more subject to the experience of violence by non-family members. While four males cite physical violence from law enforcement officers, three cite violence from an employer, and two cite violence from a teacher, no girl

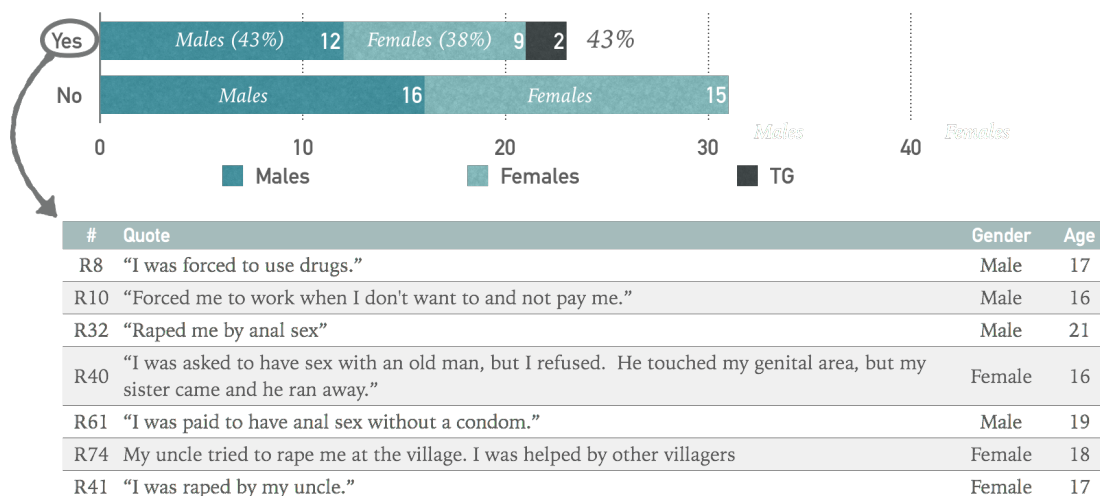
mentioned violence from a police officer or an employer, and only one mentioned a teacher. Two out of the three of those who had been the objects of police violence are street-living boys. Among those who cite engagement in commercial sex, all males describe instances of violence from their customers, while no females (among the few who cite commercial sex) indicate experiencing the same. One third of all respondents stated that strangers are the prime offenders. They did not provide further details on this. Violence from relatives the third most commonly mentioned source of violence, and an aunt and uncle are mentioned.

Sexual Violence

Conversations regarding sex, sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation are difficult to have – especially when respondents are young. Given this, interviewers in this study were trained to be particularly delicate in discussing matters such as these, reminding respondents of the confidentiality and importance of the conversation of which they were a part. The flow of conversation during interviews were structured as such so that conversations on highly sensitive topics such as sex and sexual abuse were delicately approached only after discussing numerous other facets of the respondent’s life, and after some sense of rapport had been built. Interviewers began discussions on sexual abuse by asking about adults in the respondent’s community that had asked them to do things that they did not like or were not comfortable with. Further questioning explored the respondents’ awareness of peers who may have been touched by an adult in the genital area, and then delicately asked respondents about personal experiences.

While the initial question "are there adults to ask you to do things that you do not like?" does not specifically define sexual acts, many respondents disclosed instances of rape and other forms of sexual violence without any further prompting. Forty-three percent (43%) of all respondents acknowledge adults who have ask them to do things that they do not like. Among this group are 12 males (43%) nine females (38%) and both transgender respondents (100%). A wide variety of acts are cited in response to this question. Among them, respondents cite being forced to use drugs, being anally raped, being bribed to have sex without a condom, as well as being forced to work without pay.

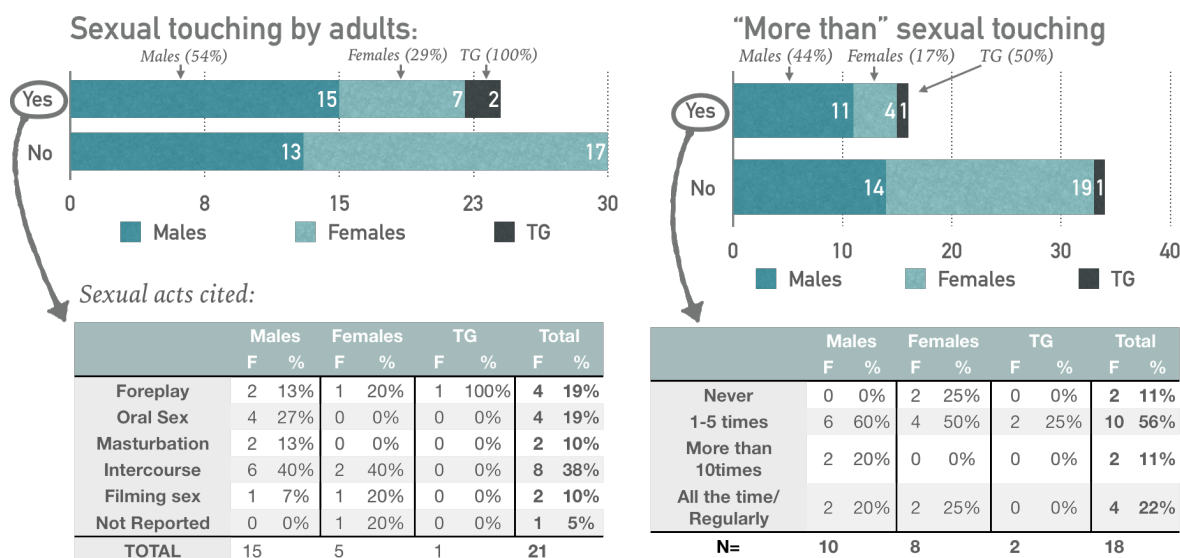
Are there adults who ask you to do things that you do not like?



Awareness of others experiencing sexual abuse: Respondents were asked about their awareness of adults in their community who ask children to do sexual things. This question was asked regarding Thai adults and adults from other countries. Well over half of respondents cite an awareness of Thai people in their community who ask children to do sexual things (Male awareness - 57%; female awareness - 25%; transgender awareness - 100%), while a somewhat lower percentage (42%) of children cite an awareness

of foreigners who ask children to do sexual things (Male awareness - 54%; female awareness - 23%; transgender awareness - 100%).

Sexual touching by adults: Respondents were then asked about instances in which adults had touched them sexually. Forty-four percent (44%) of respondents (22 people) disclose experiences of inappropriate sexual touching by at least one adult at some point in their lives. Males in the sampling are nearly twice as likely to disclose being sexually touched with 54% of boys and 29% of girls stating that they had been sexually touched. Both transgender respondents cite sexual touching by adults. The average age at which the sexual touching first occurred is 15 years of age, the youngest being age seven and the oldest being 22 years of age at the time they were first sexually touched by an adult. The majority of those who had experienced touching (56%) cite that the touching had occurred between one and five times. Two boys mentioned that abuse had occurred more than ten times, whilst two girl and two boys cite that this happens regularly or “all the time”. It should also be noted that it is likely that the following figures are conservative as some youth may be embarrassed or afraid to admit that they have been sexually abused or raped.



Respondents mainly cited being abused by their relatives or by strangers:

“When I was 12, my uncle tried to rape me at the village” (girl, 18, street-working)

“I was forced to perform oral sex” (boy, 19, street-living)

“More than” sexual touching: Following discussions on sexual touching, respondents were asked if any of these instances had gone beyond sexual touching and involved further sexual abuse. Nearly one-third of respondents (16 people or 31%) cite experiencing sexual abuse that went beyond just touching. This is significantly more prevalent among males. With 44% of males (11 people), 17% of females (four people), and one transgender respondent (50%) citing such experiences. The forms of abuse that occurred included as removal of clothing, oral sex, penetrative sex, masturbation, and sexual foreplay.

Cited instances of children being asked to have sex with adults were at times violent and sometimes involved multiple children. One street-living boy recalls an event that happened at the age of 15:

“I was drugged by a foreigner with a sleeping pill, then I was tied by a rope on my arm. After that, I was sexually abused by anal sex. This happened when I was 15 years old“ (boy, 21, street-living).

Another recounts instances of being paid to have sex with other children:

“He gave me lots of money. A farang man (foreigner) gave money to me to have sex with his 15-year-old daughter. After that he also had sex with his daughter. He watched us have sex.”

Forced sex: Respondents were asked about instances in which they may have been physically forced to have sex against their wishes. Twenty percent (20%) of respondents (eight males and two females) cite such instances. Among 10 people citing experiences of forced sex, four people (all male) cite that this has happened between one and five times, two people (both female) cite this has happened between five and 10 times, three people (all males) cite this has happened more than 10 times, and one male cites this happens to him “all the time”. Five respondents (three males, one female, and one transgender respondent) cite being physically hurt due to such instances. Among these cases is one street-living male, 21, who cites “they hit me and forced me to have anal sex.” Another street-living female, 17, cites “he would hit me if I didn’t have sex with him”. Another street-working male, 16, cites being pulled around and choked during this experience of forced sex.

Being filmed for Pornography: Furthermore, respondents were asked of instances in which they had been asked to be filmed for pornographic films. Slightly more than one and five respondents cite instances of being filmed for pornography. The majority of those disclosing instances in which they were filmed for pornography are male (six males or 23%) along with three females and both transgender respondents citing the same.

Data indicates street-living children to be at the greatest risk of sexual abuse. While significant numbers of both street-living and street-working youth had survived sexual abuse, street-living youth are considered to be significantly more vulnerable. Seven out of the nine street-living youth, over three-fourths (78%), state that they have been sexually abused. In comparison, 52% of street-working youth cite the same (eight boys and five girls).

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

Respondents were asked a series of questions that explored instances in which they, their families, or anyone else had received money, food, or a gift in exchange for the boy providing sex or sexual services to an adult. While we understand that experiences such as qualify as the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), interviewers are careful so as to describe these exploit of situations in such a way that they described the actions taking place, while refraining from the usage of such stigma-laden questions which may have caused respondents to have felt uncomfortable and/or discouraged them from answering the questions honestly.

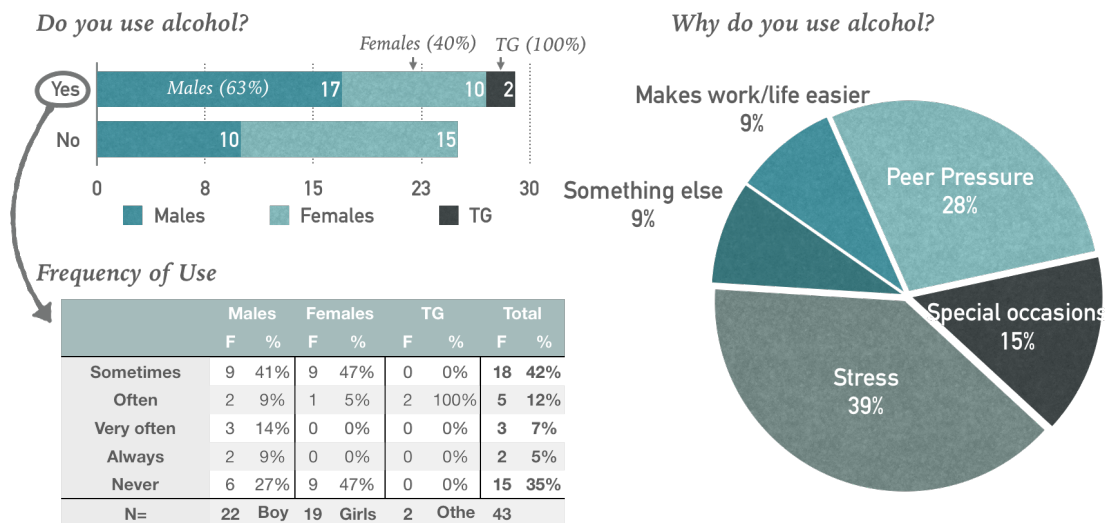
Respondents were asked if “anyone has ever provided food, money, or a gift in exchange for doing something sexual” to them. Twenty-two (22) respondents (46%) report that they had. Among these 22 are 15 males (56% of all males), five females (26% of all females) and both transgender respondents (100%). Among these, one street-working boy, 16, cites: “*I wasn't willing to but I was very young so that person took advantage of me and told me that I'd get money*”. Another street-living boys, 13, cite: “*He was a stranger that bought flowers from me. I only agreed because of the money*”.

The majority of respondents answering this variable in the affirmative cite receiving cash in exchange for sex, with a small number of respondents receiving other non-monetary compensation including clothing, transportation, food and other material possessions, such as a mobile phone. The majority of respondents, or 80%, cite they receive the money, food, or gifts themselves, while the remaining 20% cite that they give their earnings to someone else.

Among those respondents engaged in sex work, eight stated that their nationality was not Thai, but are ethnic Lahu (4), Akha (2), Burmese (1) and Thai Yai (1). Furthermore, 10 respondents stated they had started sex work when they were minors, and eight are presently minors. All of them in this group are male, except for one female. Further, 10 out of the 12 youth that engage in sex work cite previous sexual abuse prior to any form of involvement in sex work. The remaining two respondents did not answer the question.

Substance Use

The majority of respondents (78%) cite that they do not use any illegal drugs. Among the 11 people (22%) to cite illegal drug usage, 10 people (30%) are male, one person (4%) is female, and no transgender respondents cite using illegal drugs. Regarding the frequency of usage of illegal drugs the largest proportion of respondents cite that they sometimes use illegal substances, and to a lesser extent five people (12%) cite using illegal drugs "often", three people (7%) cite "very often", and two people (5%) cite using illegal drugs "always". The cited reasons for drug usage are peer pressure, curiosity, coping with stress, and celebrating special occasions. Cited drugs are glue, methamphetamines ("yaba") and paint thinner. The proportion of drug users increases considerably when crossing this variable with their living situation. Indeed, a large majority of youth living in the street uses drugs: six boys out of nine, which amounts to two thirds of street-living boys.



A directly proportional relationship is notable between substance abuse and sexual abuse. Data indicates that eight respondents out of the 11 (78%) that cite using illegal drugs had also reported sexual abuse at some point by an adult. A similar relationship is noted among those who cite using alcohol. Out of the 29 children who cite using alcohol, 16, or 55% also cite experiencing sexual abuse by an adult at some point in their lives.

A majority of males (63%) cite alcohol usage while 40% of females cite the same. Frequency of alcohol consumption also appears to be somewhat of an issue for males in comparison with females. Among

females citing alcohol usage nine in 10 cite that they only drink sometimes. Where as, I'm on the males who cite alcohol usage slightly more than half cite drinking "sometimes" with the remainder of males citing that they drink "often" (13%), very often (19%), and two males (7%) who cite that they drink "always". The main reasons for drinking are to cope with stress (53% of boys and 70% of girls and both transgender). Then comes peer pressure (41% of boys and 40% of girls and both transgender). "Making life or work easier", "feeling happy" and "just on special occasions" are also mentioned. Beyond this, both transgender respondents cite that they use alcohol "often".

Future Alternatives

Respondents were asked to describe what kinds of vocational or life skills they might be interested in pursuing if they were given the chance. This information can provide helpful data to implementing partners who have either Existing vocational programs or who desire to create a targeted program to meet the needs and interests of street involved children in Chiang Mai. In response to this question, the largest portion of children, 38%, cite a desire for language skills. This includes English, Thai, Burmese languages, among others. This is commonly cited by all genders (six males, six females, and both transgender respondents). Slightly more than one fourth, or 27%, of respondents cite a desire to learn mechanical skills, which includes motor repair, and other automotive skills. To a lesser extent, respondents mention cooking skills, tailoring skills, skills in dance and the arts, computer skills, hair and beauty skills, as well as one respondent desiring to improve her sporting skills.

Discussion

Causes for Street-Involvement

Current literature on street-connected youth indicates a variety of reasons for children to live on the street, including earning money, escaping family problems, and searching for independence. When exploring direct rationales behind children's motivations for moving to or remaining on the street, findings in Chiang Mai reveal differences between girls and boys. Data from this study shows females to be predominantly on the streets for the purpose of earning income, whilst males cite being on the streets for the purpose of excitement and to escape difficult family backgrounds. Whilst the elements of agency, freedom and fun are present for boys, street-involvement seems to be less of a choice for girls.

This may be linked to cultural and gender roles in South East Asian society, whereby it is more socially acceptable for boys to migrate alone and "gain experience" than girls. In the case of Chiang Mai, girls seem anchored in more functional roles, and comply to families' expectations of contributing to families' earnings, whilst more boys "wander" to discover the world (Tapp, 2007). This may favor increased attentiveness to "personal development" amongst boys, who readily cite a variety of benefits of being on the street and aspects of the streets they enjoy.

Furthermore, street-involved youth in Chiang Mai express a certain form of adherence and integration to Thai values and society. Their answers are generally well "culturally adapted" to South East Asian cultures, whereby collective well-being tends to outweigh individual interests. A high proportion of respondents readily put forward the importance of helping their family. The sense of revolt such as that put forward by Butler (2009) lacks here, as street-connected youth seem to fit into the common aspirations of Thai society, despite the fact that this is expressed in a somewhat alternative manner.

Life on the Streets

Participants were asked what they liked about their lives on the street. Many participants mentioned enjoying their freedom. This relates mostly to boys and the two transgender (80%) than to girls (20%).

"Freedom, I can walk, do whatever I want and go wherever I want" (boy, 16, street-living)

"My life is mine." (boy, 19, street-working)

Social relations with peers and meeting new people seemed central for many respondents, particularly for girls, as 60% of female respondents said they enjoyed meeting people and their friendships on the street. Five youth mentioned that their street-connectedness enables them to acquire new skills, mainly soft skills pertaining to life experience and personal qualities, though one mentioned language skills obtained by talking to foreigners.

"It helps me to understand human life" (boy, 15, street-working)

"It helps me to have more patience" (girl, 13, street-working)

Some respondents say that they do not like anything about their life on the streets. Most respondents (70%) declining a response to this question or answering, "I don't know" are girls. Finally, a minority of respondents also cites liking street-involvement because it is "fun" and cites that their lives are not boring.

Experiences of physical violence

Street-connected youth are typically at high-risk of being vulnerable to violence on the streets (Thomas de Benítez, 2007). This may include physical violence by police, passers-by, peers, labor and sexual exploitation, or criminal activity.

Peer violence is a main concern for respondents. While peers can indeed be a strong source of comfort and act as a substitute family for many youth, they can equally be a source of violence for street-involved youth. Violence from peers - beatings in particular - is a threat both to street-connected boys and girls, and is cited as the first major danger to boys. Street-living boys are at increased risk of witnessing peer violence, most certainly due to constant exposure and a lack of a protective environment.

Additionally, as youth lack protection from caring adults and left to their own devices, they are particularly malleable to all kinds of influence and exploitation at a young age. Responses in Chiang Mai confirm this, as the study reveals exposure to violence and increased vulnerability of boys, in particular, those that have been sexually abused as well as those that are living on the street.

Many studies, worldwide, highlight that often, street youth's strongest fear is of police violence (Aptekar, 1994). In the case of Chiang Mai however, only two respondents mentioned that this was a main source of insecurity.

Substance Use

Drug use and harmful alcohol consumption and consequent uninhibited behaviors significantly increase risks faced by children on the street. A lack of access to information, prevention messages and resources such as safe sex, condoms, clean needles, combined with sexual assault, considerably increase the threat of HIV/AIDS transmission. Although drug use is often portrayed in global research as a major concern for street-involved youth, in Chiang Mai there is relatively little use of substances. However, the proportion increases considerably when exploring further the individual experiences of those that stated they take drugs. Those that resort to drug use are mostly street-living males as well as male survivors of sexual abuse. It would appear that being a street-living male as well as a survivor of sexual abuse hence significantly increases the likelihood of drug use, however more research is needed to make this connection.

Research has put forward the link between drug use and sexual abuse. The impact of childhood sexual abuse on survivors is often devastating. Manifestations are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), increased anxiety, depression, sexual promiscuity, or increased rates of suicide (Paolucci, Genius & Violato, 2001). In this context, it is unsurprising that survivors resort more to drug use as a coping mechanism, or "emotional avoidance" that numbs the pain of traumatic experiences (Polusny and Follette, 1995 cited in Lalor & McElvaney, 2010: 13). This also sheds light on the disproportionately high number of street-living youth that are also resorting to drug use when compared to non street-living youth. The harsh realities of living on the street, frequent and repetitive exposure to stress, pressure to tolerate hard jobs, a deficit of emotional support and sense of belonging, combined with street-life subculture and drug induced collective rituals, are all contributing factors to the high rate of drug use when living on the streets.

Sexual violence and abuse

Research has examined the occurrence of sexual violence amongst street-involved youth. Studies often highlight specific experiences of girls, considered acutely susceptible to facing sexual violence and exploitation from adults and from male peers (Ray, Davey & Nolan, 2011). However, findings in Chiang Mai reveal twice as high rates of disclosure of sexual abuse amongst males in comparison to females. Furthermore, a higher proportion of boys and young men are engaged in commercial sex or are subject to sexual exploitation by adults. A growing body of research corroborate these findings. For example, recent research carried out in Sihanoukville, Cambodia reveals that out of 56 boys and 50 girls interviewed, 39% of boys and 25% of girls disclose having been sexually touched by adults (Miles & Davis, 2014). This same study reveals that 23% of boys and 13% of girls interviewed had already engaged in commercial sexual activity.

Despite this growing research, male's experiences of sexual abuse are often ignored, though estimations suggest that sexual abuse of men is much more common than generally perceived. Research states that globally one in six males are sexually abused before the age of 18, and one in four girls (Dube, et al., 2005). This number is likely to be much higher, as research has shown males to be significantly less likely to disclose sexual violence than females (Holmes & Slap, 1998). Further, one comparative study finds males with documented histories of sexual abuse significantly less likely to consider themselves sexually abused, in comparison with females in the same study. While 64% of sexually abused females considered themselves abused, only 16% of sexually abused males considered themselves the same (Widom & Morris, 1997).

Different reasons explain this lack of attention to abuse against boys. Gender stereotypes and representations of masculinity whereby boys are labeled as "strong" and resilient and girls weak and vulnerable remain the norm. The notions of male dominance and invulnerability heavily reign not only in academic discourses, but also in the media (Jones, 2010). As such, boys are generally lumped in the 'perpetrator' role, and girls are their victims. Furthermore, shame and stigma remains a pervasive reality for male victims of sexual violence, as "real" men are seldom perceived to be vulnerable. Male survivors of sexual abuse often face interrogations on their sexual identity, and fear that experiencing abuse will make them homosexual, and that if abuse was to be revealed, society will perceive them as such.

This reality undoubtedly has a direct influence on the rate of disclosure of sexual abuse experienced by boys, and the reality may well be that the extent of abuse against males is in fact unknown as survivors are so reluctant to talk. In many cases, boys may simply not be asked about experiences of abuse by carers and social workers. Additionally, a lack of services specifically designed for boys and professional knowledge and awareness on the topic also may discourage boys to disclose sexual abuse, fearing they will neither be believed nor understood.

When examining the high number of disclosures of sexual abuse amongst street-connected boys in Chiang Mai, certain factors that may have influenced the lower rate of disclosures amongst girls must be taken in account. Cultural practices may make it extremely difficult for girls to disclose sexual abuse. In conservative societies, girls may be shunned and ostracized from their communities as being "tainted" if they are seen as victims of sexual abuse. A label, which may severely affect their prospects of finding a husband and making a family.

Additionally, with respect to methodology, the team that carried out the research was experienced in talking to boys and young men, and as such knew prior to the survey one third of male respondents. This proportion of participants that trusted the team may have revealed more intimate details on their lives

because of this pre-existing bond. The female respondents, on the contrary, were all unknown to the social workers, and this may have made them less inclined to openly discuss their experiences with strangers. Taking this into account, the real rate of sexual abuse amongst the female street-connected population in Chiang Mai could in fact be somewhat higher than what was revealed by this study.

Nonetheless, and despite these limitations, it is undeniable that, regardless of the reasons behind disclosure or nondisclosure, the number of males stating that they have been sexually abused in Chiang Mai remains unsettling. This is irrespective of whether the actual rate of abuse amongst girls is higher than revealed by respondents or not.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Work

Results in Chiang Mai expose a higher rate of male youth revealing commercial sex work than females, with a total of 12 males and five females stating that they engage in some form of prostitution. Male sex work is a phenomenon that is rarely mentioned in literature. A review on 166 articles published in social science journals revealed that most did not acknowledge the existence of male sex workers. When they were mentioned, male sex workers were attributed considerably more agency and decision-making power than female sex-workers, who tended to be portrayed as vulnerable to violence and in most cases pressured into prostitution (Vincent, 2010).

The stigma attached to sex work, as a heterosexual male, is a unique factor to take in account with regard to the exclusion of this group in literature and social programming, as society tends to question sexual identity of male sex workers, assuming that they are homosexual, which is in fact often not the case (Vincent, 2010). The term of “men who have sex with men” (MSM) attempts to address this bias by placing the focus on the person’s behavior rather than on sexual orientation, enabling heterosexual or bisexual men to relate to the term whilst refuting being homosexual.

Sex work is associated with harm of different natures, such as criminalization, hazards to health, including increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases through unprotected sex, limited access to health services, and discrimination when using such services. Sex workers are also at high risk of being subject to all kinds of violence and by a wide spectrum of individuals that range from customers to police officers. Male sex workers are potentially at risk to additional stigmatization as their identity as ‘male sex workers’ often drifts far from culturally accepted standards masculinity norms, as prostitution is typically a profession practiced by “deviant” women. As such, they face particularly harsh discrimination and stigma, attached with increased risks of violence associated with homophobia (NSWP, 2014). This is apparent in the answers collected in Chiang Mai, where only male respondents involved in commercial sex cite enduring violence from customers.

Thailand is a well-known destination for sex tourists and attracts pedophiles from around the world, which may be a factor that leads boys to engage in commercial sex work (Frederick, 2010). Though the majority of the “customers” of youth engaged in commercial sex is Thai men, a high proportion of children and youth in Chiang Mai had indeed witnessed male foreigners approaching boys and young males for sex and several mentioned experiences with foreigners during open questions. Though the interview instrument was limited in terms of questions focused on the demand-side of sex work, this does reveal that sex tourism may shed light on the high prevalence of commercial sexual exploitation amongst street-connected boys. In addition to local exploitative networks, undoubtedly sex tourism influences the high rate of males engaged in commercial sex in Chiang Mai. This seems to be in agreement with evidence found during field work, where all males citing involvement in sex work, were also encountered in tourist areas in Chiang Mai.

As mentioned in previous studies with street-based youth, there is an overlap in Chiang Mai between survivors of sexual abuse and those engaged in commercial sex work (Nada & Suliman, 2010). Ten out of the 15 participants, who cite involvement in sex work, also cite sexual abuse at some point in their lives. Though much caution should be taken to avoid generalizations and cause further stigmatization of survivors of abuse, some research puts forward potential consequences of childhood sexual abuse later on in life. Survivors may be more prone to engage in high-risk sexual behaviors such as unprotected sex, having sexual intercourse at an early age and with a higher number of partners, engaging in prostitution, and also being more susceptible to re-exploitation as adults (Lalor & McElvaney, 2010). As such, the overwhelming majority of those involved in commercial sex in this study had previously endured sexual abuse.

An additional observation in Chiang Mai is the confusion that seems to result between “sex work” and “sexual abuse” during the interviews. Repeatedly those involved in sex work mixed terms and substituted one for another. This could provide us with some indication on the limited agency amongst street boys that are engaged in survival commercial sex in Chiang Mai, as they may be associating selling sexual services with sexual abuse. This may be a manifestation of a coping strategy whereby a survivor of sexual abuse attempts to regain control over a situation where they felt powerless. Commercial sexual exploitation is undoubtedly related to a relation of unequal power between two individuals, whereby one person dominates the other. Accordingly, one’s age or gender becomes irrelevant, and adults may also be victims of commercial sexual exploitation depending on their situation and the agency that leads them to engage in commercial sex work. More in-depth and qualitative research is needed to explore these themes further.

Statelessness

A key concern in South East Asia with respect to street-connected youth is statelessness (West, 2000), a finding that is supported by this study in Chiang Mai. Considering that ethnic non-Thais represent only 3.3% of Thailand’s total population (CIA, 2015) and that 63.6 % of participants of this research were ethnically non-Thai, youth from ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented amongst street-based youth in Chiang Mai. This lack of formal identity further increases the vulnerability of these youth, confronted with reduced access to social and health services, lack of knowledge of their rights and often-limited knowledge of Thai language. As such, they are combining various risk factors and cumulating various deprivations (Thomas de Benítez, 2011).

Youth from ethnic minorities are also disproportionately represented among those engaging in commercial sexual activities. Indeed, being in particularly vulnerable situations, most certainly lack the opportunity to access alternative employment. With limited substitute prospects, they may more easily resort to commercial sex work.

Recommendations

For the development sector

In light of the silence and lack of information surrounding sexual violence against males, efforts should be increased in terms of supporting male survivors of sexual abuse and enabling social service providers to gain appropriate knowledge and understanding of this topic to better meet the needs of vulnerable children as a whole.

Public Awareness and Stigma Reduction

It is important that the wider development community and general public be made aware of the existence of the abuse suffered by males, which can help to dispel the taboo and stigma that fuels the silence surrounding male vulnerabilities to violence. Advocacy can be pursued through campaigns and information distribution to raise awareness of the issue, which can in turn work to encourage male survivors to come forward and disclose any abuse they may have suffered. Government authorities and law enforcement must also critically be sensitized to this topic, in order to enable appropriate prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence.

Public awareness campaigns within communities and through media, which communicate the humanity, dignity, and personhood of street-involved youth (both males and females) are needed. Rather than viewing street-involved children as shameful nuisances or public ‘eyesores’, it is important that media, NGO’s and other socially involved agencies work to educate both the development sector and the general public on the deeper, systemic social and economic realities that underpin the issue of street-involved youth.

It may be useful to utilize youth’s interests in arts, music, dance, and sports to both develop the self-identities, expression, and confidence of street-involved youth, as well as improving the ways that they are perceived within the public eye. Some of this could be accomplished through community initiatives such as mobile theater, sports programs, art training programs, and other community development activities focused on raising the awareness (and perception) of street-involved groups.

Child and Youth-Centered Research and Programming

In order to accurately capture and understand the experiences of street-connected youth, it may be important for NGOs and/or child-development organizations to adopt a child and youth-centered approach in research in order to uncover the experiences of children and youth. Presently, children and young people are often left at the receiving end of social services and often have little-to-no input in the development of research and programming to define, understand, and meet their needs. Similarly, it is often consultants and public health experts who undertake research, developing questions that they have deemed to be most important to explore vulnerability factors in a child’s life. While adult input is needed, it is similarly important that researchers and practitioners allow children to serve as the ‘experts of their own realities’, utilizing their experiences and understandings of their own environments to develop better and more child-centered social programs and research methodologies.

In addition to this, there is a need to develop and utilize strong educational resources for awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation geared toward children themselves, such as the resources at www.good-touch-bad-touch-asia.org. Beyond this, there is need for better advocacy and vigilance for children within their communities. It is important for parents and adults within communities to understand that young males are equally at risk of abuse as well as young girls and that they are in need of

protection. Community centers, youth clubs, and churches should introduce education about sex, appropriate loving relationships, sexual abuse, and the dangers of pornography, working to provide a safe and non-condemning place for children and young adults to discuss about sex and sexuality.

For policy makers

Anecdotal data from key informants in this study indicate a continuing issue of government-mandated street ‘cleanup’ for street-involved children in the Chiang mai area. Beyond this, qualitative data from respondents indicates discrimination and violence from local law enforcement officials, particularly among respondents living directly on the streets. Responding to street-involved groups in this way criminalizes vulnerable persons, marginalizing them further.

Additionally, key informants and desk review within this study reveal a great deal of discrimination with regard to access to public health care services and particular stigma and discrimination from health service providers. Awareness should be raised within the health and social welfare sectors. Furthermore, issues surrounding violence against males should be integrated into existing government strategies on ending violence.

For researchers

Given the limited literature available on sexual exploitation and abuse of street-involved youth (particularly male), more research could help to better understand how government and non-government groups can better work to protect such groups and ensure that their rights are protected, including:

Research on the unique vulnerabilities of young males

Street-involved males are often labeled “criminals”, “deviant”, “delinquent”, or “violent”, but rarely are they discussed as potential victims of violence, particularly sexual abuse, on the streets. This critical silence on this topic potentially renders boys even more at risk to sexual abuse than girls. Considering that the majority of street children are boys, there is a deep need to pursue further and deliberate research on this topic. More in-depth, specific research conducted on the abuse experienced by these groups will work to help expand the focus beyond the systematic examination of girls’ unique vulnerabilities to also include those of boys. As such, there is a key need for gender-disaggregated data in all research within this field of inquiry, which will help produce knowledge reflecting the reality of abuse faced by all groups on the street.

It is crucial for this debate to take place in an inclusive, non-discriminatory context, and as such not occur in the frame of an “either-or” debate. Focusing on males’ experiences should by no means remove the importance of the need to equally pay attention to females’ experiences, as it is undeniable that in many contexts girls and women are objects of particular discrimination and deprivations. However, a truly gendered lens requires that similarities and differences in respect to male and female’s vulnerabilities are systematically examined, and that specific solutions be designed out of the knowledge and realities acquired.

Research on Sexually Harmful Behaviors Among Children and Youth

Findings within this study show violence from peers (bullying and physical violence) to be of particular concern. Further research on street-connected children and youth should incorporate more specific questions to gather more data on this. Additionally, anecdotal information from social workers and caretakers indicates sexually harmful behaviors among youth to be quite commonplace both on the streets and within institutional care facilities. While this seems to be commonplace, few resources are available

for caretakers and social practitioners to understand and meet the developmental needs of children who sexually harm others. Further exploratory and qualitative research may be needed to explore the phenomenon of sexually harmful behaviors of children both within the Thai context and globally.

Child and Youth-Centered Research Methodologies

Despite many well-intended initiatives within child and youth development circle, child and youth-friendly research and programming remains largely theoretical and is seldom applied in practice. Limited access to knowledge on what this truly means in practice, as well as a lack of practical advice both for practitioners and academics may be key reasons for this disparity between theory and practice. Furthermore, a truly child-centered approach in research requires a high amount of resources, staffing, time, and “buy in” from teams, as well as challenging the idea that adults are the sole ‘experts’ (Laws & Mann, 2004). In a genuine child-centered approach, ‘research’ should become a real project and an integral part of an organization’s activity for a certain period. However, many practitioners may not perceive themselves to be skilled enough, nor view this as a key priority in their work. As such, research too often remains viewed by practitioners as outside their scope and mandate, as they focus on direct service delivery. Also, in many cases practitioners may not see the true added value of research. Such research could greatly benefit from more synergies between the academic and the practitioner world.

Future research should explore a similar range of topics, but developed and planned by children, and the results would most certainly differ to those revealed here, potentially revealing an even higher rate of disclosure of sexual abuse among young males. Not only is there a need to reunite policy and practice in this field, but also to do so in a truly child-friendly manner, whereby “youth” are no longer the sole object of a study, but also the study also actively serves the concerned population and engages them in a meaningful way. This also reduces all risks of unwillingly contributing towards exploiting respondents, by collecting data and omitting to share initial findings with them, overlooking their inclusion discussions on results, or in the design of follow up activities for example. In this sense, child and youth-centered research could greatly benefit from a more critical approach (Neumann, 1994) whereby the aim is to empower vulnerable populations, fully embracing that research is a highly subjective exercise and using the process of research to build capacities of certain groups to express their voice.

Conclusions

This study has aimed to provide a brief look at some of the key vulnerabilities to sexual violence and exploitation that exist among street-involved youth in Chiang mai, Thailand. This is to help build a better understanding of this often-overlooked group of people in order for NGOs and social service providers to serve them better. The study finds street-involved youth in Chiang mai to be deeply vulnerable to a wide range of violence, including sexual and physical violence.

These findings have exposed a high amount of violence experienced by street-connected children and youth, and in diverse settings. They also reveal different experiences depending on gender. Boys were particularly vulnerable to violence, especially violence from peers, sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation. Most children within this study cite having personally witnessed or directly experienced violence in some form. Peers and family members were found to be the main perpetrators of violence both for boys and girls. Boys are more subject to experiencing violence by non-family members, i.e. law enforcement, an employer, or a teacher.

The findings reveal some significant differences depending on participants' gender in reference to sexual violence. Though the survey only included two transgender respondents. The experiences of violence between these two respondents in different settings and on many occasions were striking. This includes commercial sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, and violence in the family as well as police violence. Experiences of violence among males were particularly high.

Results expose a high rate of sexual abuse, with 44% of all participants stating that adults had already inappropriately sexually touched them. Even more striking is the higher prevalence of sexual abuse amongst boys in comparison to girls. Boys were also acutely susceptible to commercial sexual exploitation, also in higher proportions than girls. A majority of these boys had previously been victims of sexual abuse and were using drugs. Ethnicity and being a survivor of sexual abuse was special risk factors in terms of future commercial sexual exploitation and drug use. Living on the street is an additional aspect that increases risks of exposure to all types of violence. This study also reveals high prevalence of sexual abuse amongst street-connected girls, as well as boys, in Chiang Mai. Despite their absence in discussions on sexual abuse and exploitation, this study's findings in Chiang Mai indicate a higher reported prevalence of sexual violence against males, in comparison with females.

While girls have long been viewed as victims, boys are victimized as well. It is vital that NGOs, religious organizations, and government groups adopt a holistic and balanced understanding of human vulnerability. It is important that we understand children--regardless of gender-- as whole persons with their own individual sets of unique vulnerabilities and resiliencies. Without the development of such a nuanced and human-centered understanding of human vulnerability (as opposed to gender-centered), significant groups of vulnerable persons are at risk to remain just as they are - hidden in plain sight.

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