

Impacts of sex tourism in bangkok



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Introduction

Sex tourism and child sex tourism have been booming in the last past recently years. It has been one of the main sources of economic in Thailand, when people think of sex tourism and child sex tourism; Thailand would be one of the first countries that pop out into people's mind. However, there is always a bad side to it. Sex tourism and child sex tourism could be bad to the society and morality.

In this analysis, there will be a study about negative impacts and positive impacts of sex tourism in Bangkok, Thailand. What are the benefits it brings to the country and what are the damages it causes?

Current situation of the sex industry in Thailand

According to Far eastern Economic review (2009) due to the current economic slump, hundreds of factories and projects have shut down across Thailand, causing countless workers both Thai and foreign unemployed. The estimate number is approximately 100 000 workers a month and it might jump up to 1. 5 million by the end of the year. Even though they built up more and more unskilled factory jobs, however the wage is ten to twenty times lower than the pay of the lowest sex worker employed at beer bars (Ashoka). Therefore most women would choose to be a sex worker instead of factory worker. Many of them are having double lives and keeping their employment hidden from their families. Even some of them get treated badly, they silently suffer and tolerate with it because they need money to support them and their family and they know there is always a ready group of poorer migrants that are available to replace them anytime.

Sex tourism in Thailand is a colorful industry, where u could almost ask anything you are looking for pertaining ' sex'. They have from prostitutes, escorts, transsexuals, show girls, lady boy show, go-go bars, clubs and massage parlors to ping pong show. More and more thrilling entertainments are going in the market to lust more tourists to Bangkok, Thailand, Asia's Red District.

Most of the girls working as a prostitute or hookers can be found easily in red district areas. Most of them are sexy, cheerful and fun and can speak English. They can spend all evening, all week with the customers if both parties agree on the price but they can be a bit bitchy too if the customer is stingy. Some girls they will name the price but some are shy, they depend on the generosity of the customers. The cost of Bangkok prostitutes can be ranged from 1000 baht (short time) to 6000 baht. However for the girls who work in the bar, the customer has to pay a bar fine before he can take her home with him, a fine should be around 200 to 500 baht depend on the place. An entertainment show like a lady boy show cost a customer around 550 baht. But, for child prostitute, a customer can get a child with 30 baht.

Problem Statement

Sex tourism and child sex tourism, it has become one of the most attractive type of tourism in this modern world. More and more people are going for sex tourism and they do not feel shy or embarrassing to admit they travel for sex experiences. Sex tourism and child sex tourism can bring a lot of money to the country and job opportunities to people directly or indirectly but however, due to the fast growing of the industry; sex tourism and child sex tourism have brought many misleading consequences and damages. Sex

trafficking, sex trade and diseases. Once the victims are traded or trafficked, the traffickers will make sure they have complete control over the victims, leave them no rights or freedom over their own bodies thus enslaving them to the sex industry world. Furthermore, they will leave the victims so psychologically and physically abused that they do not dare to run away. They put debt bondage on them and force them to pay back before they could leave the sex trade. According to ECPAT, studies have shown that a child prostitute can serve between two to thirty clients per week, which can be estimated between 100 to 1500 clients per year and many of them are below 10 years old (Nair, no date). Most of them are still so young and they do not know what really is going on, all they know is listen to the orders else they would be beaten or left starve. The victims that are engaged in sex industry have both their mental and physical psychological affected. Their living condition is bad and their meals are irregular and not healthy and they rarely receive treatment when they are sick only until it gets too serious. Not to mention STD, HIV/AIDS, according to a research, HIV positive rates are 42% to 54% among sex workers and the percentage will increase in the future. Apart from that, they suffer from exhaustion, infections and violence. If they do not work hard and earn enough money they would be punished. Most of them would feel scared, hopeless, depression and low self-esteem since they do not know who to run to for help or protect. Few are brave enough to run away but most of them will choose drugs and suicide to forget and reduce the suffering.

Every problem has reasons behind it, so do sex trafficking, sex trade and the diseases. The demand with lenient laws on prostitution has pushed Thailand

sex industries grow faster and stronger. The more unique demands pour in the better the services and the greater surprises would be provided. So there will not be any stop for it. Go in hand with it; it is the poverty and cultural perception. Thai believes in working as sex worker is their only choice and what their ancestor did so they keep faith in it. In addition, there are too many poor families in Thailand and they have very little education and skills in them so they would not earn much if they work in factory or restaurant compare being as a sex worker.

Research Questions

Here are some research questions that I will look into for my proposal:

Whether Thai government purposely promotes sex tourism to drive Thai national growth?

What are the reasons for not legalizing sex tourism in Thailand?

Why Thailand should not practice child sex tourism?

What are the damages sex tourism and child sex tourism have caused to Thailand?

What are the benefits sex industries bring to the country?

Research Objectives

The research objective of this study is to find out the answers for the questions mentioned above.

To investigate whether Thai government purposely promotes sex tourism to drive Thai national growth.

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To investigate the reasons for not legalizing sex tourism in Thailand.

To investigate the reasons why Thailand should not practice child sex tourism.

To do a research on the damages sex tourism and child sex tourism have caused to Thailand.

To find out the benefits sex industries bring to the country.

Hypothesis Statement

In this statement, a requirement to determine the significant relationship between the cause and effect of sex tourism is recommended. The hypothesis should be able to predict the relationship between the variables.

Sex industry in Thailand increases the number of child prostitutes.

The intercourse between sex worker and customer could cause STD and other diseases.

The existence of sex tourism does increase the number of STD patients.

Human trafficking will increase as the demand for sex tourism and child sex tourism increase.

Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: The trafficking triangle.

The conceptual framework above was designed by Phinney (no date), the author set up a relationship between supply, demand and impunity with human trafficking. The author shows a relationship between them which

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helps human trafficking activities develop and growth. When there is demand, there will be supply since there are purchasers who demand for it and due to demand, supply and lenient law; the traffickers take it as their advantage to traffic more and more women and children. In another hand, supply is the most visible factors among the three. The drives behind it contribute significant reasons for more trafficking to happen, poverty, unemployment, threaten and dream of a better life, etc. And then impunity, since sex tourism injects a lot of money to the country economy, so the government often close one eye unless a victim is caught and agree to report, else they would let the situation going on until it is getting out of control.

Figure 2: Reasons/drivers for sexual activity along a continuum of volition.

This conceptual framework was conducted by Weissman (2006). This research concentrates in the prevention of HIV among the youth, especially the girls and the reasons why young people engage in the sexuality activity. The framework above shows the drivers of 2 different points of view, one is by forced and the other is by volunteer. He believes there are reasons behind for young girls volunteer themselves in having relationship with older man or another boy her age. It might due to emotional security, material security like gift or money, or for the pleasure during the intercourse or it was due to the ambition for power, social status, and an escape for a better life. Whereas for the young girls who are forced, the main reason is because of money, most of them have financial problems or they have been threatened by other to turn themselves as prostitute. Even though, his point here is to educate them, either they are forced or offered themselves

willingly they should protect themselves to avoid HIV/AIDS or other STD infections.

Scope and Limitations

Scope: I choose Thailand for my topic is due to its booming now in the world and of its unique nature services. Everyone knows about Thailand as one of the hubs for sex tourism and also the range of services they provide, as long there is a demand for it, Thailand will not disappoint the customers.

Limitation: Being students, we have a lot of limitations, we do not get a lot of help and support that we seek for. Most of the time, we can only get the information through journals and perhaps people's opinion through internet and not directly from the source. For instance, one of my research questions I ask about " Whether Thai government purposely promotes sex tourism to drive Thai national growth?" Due to my limitation, it is almost impossible for me to get a chance to have an interview with the government people. I will not be able to get an audience with them.

Besides that, there are money issues, time restraints and limited resources, for research experiment, I need to conduct surveys or questionnaires to the people that are concerned include sex workers, pimps, traffickers, victims, etc but I do not have time, resources and money to go to Thailand to do so. In addition, a GPD is needed to prove the importance of sex tourism in Thailand economic but most of the time the country do not give fully information about it, because there are so many illegal parties going on in Thailand sex industry. Apart from that, I need to identify the location of the commercial sex markets and the places where all the activities occurred.

Significance of the study

The main reason why I choose this topic to write about is to alert the world and tell them what sex tourism and child sex tourism is all about. Many people have very vague ideas of the industry and how it actually works. Most of them only look at how they want sex industry to be and they totally ignore the bad effects behind it. For instance, sex shows, do the tourists even think about the girls who are doing it, how they actually think or feel or whether they were forced to do it for something call ‘ money or threaten by the brothels or traffickers’. Does human right even exist in this context? And human trafficking, many women and children have been trafficked, traded or sold but no one seems to try to stop it but they just close one eye. ECPAT estimates there are more than one million children worldwide that are engaged in sex trade each year. Poverty, cultural perception and demand are the main reasons that make the industry grow faster and stronger. Whenever there is a demand, there will be supply as many people are unemployed and most of them are in financial crisis. However, people are neglected what might hunt them afterwards, the diseases, the psychological effects and their unsure future.

CHAPTER TWO

2. 1 Introduction

Sex tourism “ involves travel across national or international borders in order to take part in a non-reproductive sexual encounter. The sexual encounter may be with an adult or minor, man, women, transsexual or transvestite. It must involve an exchange of money or material goods for a sexual act” (Ward, 2010).

According to ECPAT (2008), child sex tourism (CTS) is defined as “ Sexual exploitation of children by a person or persons who travel from their home district, home geographical region, or home country in order to have sexual contact with children.”

Gregg (2003) stated that ‘ sex itself constitutes a social structure, emerging from desire, poverty, and gender inequalities that enable men to drink, be violent, and fornicate openly, but sanction women to suffer bodily and linguistically. Women’s pursuit of security with at best quasi-monogamous primary partners heightens their exposure to bearings and STDs but also their honor in the eyes of the community. Pursuing liberdade (freedom) instead with multiple partners expands their options but risks social approbation, dampened marital prospects, and cancer. Sexism, racism, colonial exploitation, and academic research forged misconceptions of femaleness and sexuality that endanger their health. Cervical cancer is absurdly loaded with metaphoric potential”.

The origin of sex tourism as a global industry may be traced back to Asia during Vietnam War against America. In Thailand, sex tourism started to have its new path after Vietnam War in late 1950’s. It has gained its popularity in every way. During the war, American used Thailand as their base and a place for recreation and rest for American soldiers, which the soldiers themselves called I&I, it stands for intercourse and intoxication. During their stay, many brothels, clubs, bars and massage parlors were formed and they boosted up Thai economic; it contributed around \$16 million into Thai economy annually (Phoenix, 1991). From then, it has become one of the main sources of economic in Thailand. In order to satisfy

and increase the demand, Thai government legitimated the Entertainment Act which allowed the operations of all forms of entertainment to serve the military. Then the government kept encouraging the development of sex industry openly to increase the revenues from the prostitution business. At the same time, many rumors were spreading about the cheap available sex in Southeast Asia that many curious men had to go and witness themselves. In another word, American soldiers transformed local prostitution markets into massive prostitution industries.

Alongside with it, child sex tourism was developing. It was all due to the lack of child protection laws and regulation of child prostitution but above all, it was the cause of poverty.

2. 2 What drives sex tourism?

So what drives sex tourism in Thailand? Many studies have been carried out to identify the reasons that drive sex tourism in Thailand. Many explanations have been pointed out like the poverty, the government policies, the demand from the tourists, the cultural perception, and in addition the low cost and the unique services that they can provide the customers.

Firstly, the poverty, one of the major problems in Thailand, except for the big cities, many rural area and un-development districts are very poor. Added to it, they do not plan birth control, so many poor families have 4 to 5 children which just make their situation worse. Many are struggling to find a way to support their family. Alternatively, in another case, where the family is in debt and they are threatened to pay for it or they fail their agriculture or farm work and they need money to cover for it. Many parents have sold their

children to pay for the debt. So when the agents tactfully approach the families, most of the family would trade their daughter for money and let them become sex workers. Not only that, many married women who then become widowed or left by their husbands and have their children to take care of, they do not have much options. It also includes many young girls that fed up of living in a life with no future; they are willing to trade everything for a better life. Many of them are exposed through television how a luxury easy life should be, the feeling of being rich, the ability to buy expensive beautiful things. And then they get influenced by their friends or follow the lead of the oldest among them, believing by becoming a prostitute they could change and become rich. Moreover, for them, foreigners equal to money, a gateway for a better life and a ticket to oversea where they can experience what they deserve. Whether they are on business or leisure most of the time they could pay more than the average local clients or if the girl is lucky they could become their lover and have a better life. For the girls, becoming a prostitute for them is one of the easiest options to achieve what they want.

In 2006, a study shows the annual turnover rate of sex industry in Thailand is around US\$ 43 billion per year, which is equivalent to one third of Thai economy. Daily around 4.6 million Thai men demand for prostitutes and yearly number of foreign tourists is 500 000 and most of them come from wealthy countries like America or Europe. Corrupt government is another factor that encourages the growth of the industry, however the amount of money they receive from the industry is much more than the other industries which contribute the expansion of prostitutions. This is the main reason why

sex tourism in Thailand expands; the government wants the money it contributes to the country. Even though the government does not advertise it openly but most of the time they close one eye on most of activities sex industries do. In addition, lack of employment opportunities and vast income gaps between developing world on the one hand combined with local and international demand for commercial sexual services on the other, continue to create the push and pull factors forcing women and children onto prostitution.

Then, the cultural perception, from long ago, Thai convinced that in the family the oldest daughter supposes to support the family by earning money, the second help the family by doing the chores, taking care of the family and the younger one receives the education. So in most Thai families, the oldest one is often encourage going to bigger city to find job to support the family. For them it is a sense a duty or obligation to their parents, to share the family's burden. If they come from village or have little education or no work skills, they have only little choice but become a sex worker as it is the only job that helps them to earn fast money with good pay. Moreover, many Thai women believe prostitution will protect them from getting raped and working as a prostitute is less degrading than working in the factory or fast food restaurants. There is also Thai society placed on virginity, which is meant to be preserved for one's husband. However, the belief is backfired, for instance, among rape cases; after the girls lose their virginity they think they do not have any value anymore, so the only choice left for them is to become a sex worker.

There are also cultural and sociological factors that affect children way of thinking. They are expected to listen to all the rules set by the adults, disobedient is an act that cannot be tolerated and they can be punished for it. Besides that, with a historical legacy of foreign imperialism and the societal hierarchy such a system had fostered, children become vulnerable to adult predators, precisely those who are foreign.

Thirdly, the demand, mainly the demand for sex tourism and child sex tourism is from male customers, especially from wealthy, developed nations and the fact that commercial sex is considered a male right in a male dominant commodity culture; contribute a lot to this demand. Even though, the majority of sex tourists are male but there are still female who travel for sex and child sex tourism.

Thailand is known for providing good services with reasonable price. In addition, Western men are often attracted to Asian women's characteristics, for instance, their hair, the features, the way they talk or their graceful movements. Besides that, the nature of services is different too, for example, for them, sexual services are usually bought the same way as normal commercial goods, both parties agree on the price for a specific task, and then the services will be delivered. After the service, they do not longer expect the prostitute to cuddle or act as their lover after sex but leave them after it. But compare to Asian women, some of them even cook, clean their room for the customers after the service and do not ask for extra money. They like the way they are treated by Asian women. Therefore, the demand from the tourists will keep increase and not decrease.

Many people believe that sex tourism is not an exploitative practice and the children and female workers who are involved in the industry are willing and decide to choose this type of job for themselves. The idea of the workers being forced never cross their mind, because most of the time sex workers always look cheerful and smiling in front of sex tourists. Another common belief among sex tourists is that they think they are helping the victims financially. They believe by giving the victim money and gifts in exchange for sexual service they have helped the poor child and his or her family out of poverty. One of child sex tourists said “ On this trip, I had sex with a 14 year old girl [...] and a 15 year old [...] I am helping them financially. If they don't have sex with me, they may not have enough food. If someone has a problem with me doing this, let UNICEF feed them. I've never paid more than \$20 to these young women and that allows them to eat for a week.” It may be true what the child sex tourist said but where is the moral behind it. It then leads to another reason why third world countries have a high demand for sex tourism, ' racist'. Many sex tourists hold a strong view about them being superior than other people compare to their own and have sexual activities with younger girls in those countries consider acceptable than it is in developed world (The Protection Project, 2007). When there is a demand there will be supply. As Pavena Hongsakula, a Minister in the Prime Minister's Office in 1999 wrote to The Bangkok Post, “...The Thai government does not and will not condone sex tourism. Although sex tours may bring in some foreign currencies, they are against all the moral principles we believe in. The sexual service business is an internal problem that we are trying to curb, but controlling the supply will not help much if the demand keeps pouring in.”

Furthermore, Thailand is known as the “ Land of Smile”, they reassure they would provide whichever services that are asked from the customers and it would exceed what they expect from. For instance, Ping pong shows which refers as human zoo tourism, MacKinnon said, “ Pornography of Asian women sold in the West has been almost entirely pornography of torture, this is just presenting that in the flesh”. In the show, women have to do ridiculous terrible things, from eels to snakes to catfish, it is hurt to watch but for western men it is a form of entertainment. One tourist commented on the Ping Pong show, said, “ It’s like a form of art, these women are really talented. They’re making money the same way any other athlete makes money”. The tourists really do not care much about the value of the sex workers and they have no respects or sympathy towards them.

2. 3 Child Sex Tourism

There are two types of child sex tourists, one travel for a short period and they will come back to their home country, the later, they stay in the destination and travel around those neighbor countries too, most of the time they would apply for a job. However, most of them tend to travel independently to the chosen destination. They learn about the places through internet, forum chat or word of mouth. They also have specialized websites where they could post on the updates of information, advices and experiences of different destinations. In the websites they have chat room where they can discuss and suggest each other. Once they are in the destination, they could get more information through taxis drivers, advertisements, hotels or bars to gain the access to child prostitution. Otherwise, for instance, in Cambodia, they find their victim by working

around the neighborhood, beach area, riverside where the poor children are living on the street, begging or selling souvenirs. To make their first move, they will give the kids gifts, candies, meals or jewelry (The Protection Project, 2007). In many other places, the children will seek the pedophiles by themselves in the area where foreigners are known to congregate, or the pimps will approach the tourists for negotiating. Then those who stay for longer period of time and travel back and forth within the region of interest or take up residence with the purpose of abuse children. For instance, they travel to Thailand then move on to Cambodia or Philippines and shift back to Thailand for renew visa purpose or other circumstances. Reports from Southeast Asia, Central America and Africa all pointed out that most of them often look for employment as English teachers, helping workers or similar occupations to possess easy access to the children. For instance, they would come in close contacts with the victims even his or her family, so the family would somehow depends financial on them because while abusing they would provide the family money or gifts. Many other cases occurred where the foreigner adopts the child and claims he would take care of the child but in reality, he is using the child for abusing and sexuality purposes. In addition, there is also tour operators that organize sex tour to Thailand, most of them always promise the customer the finest girls they could find in Thailand but there is no guaranteed whether the girls are not underage (The Protection Project, 2007).

In 2006, studies conduct by Thai government and NGOs of Thailand reported there is approximately 30 000 to 40 000 prostitutes are below the age of 18

that are exploited in the commercial sex industry in Thailand. (World vision 2007)

2. 4 Human Trafficking

According to the UN protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, human trafficking means “ the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar or slavery, servitude or the removal or organs.”

In 2003, 177 of 257 cases of suspected human trafficking reported by the DATJP were receiver through the Hotline. In 2005 the hotline received over 700 calls, which indicates the numbers of human trafficking is increasing and the authority cannot do much to stop them.

Sex trafficking in another word is modern day form of slavery in which the victims are forced, fraud or coercion in sex act. Victims of sex trafficking can be anyone, women or men, girls or boys but mostly are women and young girls. Due to the lack of knowledge and hardship of finding employment from newly industrialized cities in Thailand, many of them rely on trafficking illegal immigrants to work as sex slaves. Many women and children are being sold

by parents, lovers into sex trade or being kidnapped by traffickers. And many others naively agree to migrate with traffickers in hope of having better life in another country, financial opportunities that are promised or a false marriage proposal that turns into a bondage situation (ACF, 2008).

Unfortunately, few of them aware of the life that they are going to live in, bad food and living condition, low wages, sexual abuse, as well as the physical force and psychological control by traffickers. For instance, a study of post trafficked women in Europe reports 95% of victims interviewed experienced physical or sexual violence while they were in trafficking situation. Sex trafficking victims are forced to work for many different forms of commercial sexual exploitation such as prostitution, pornography, stripping, or live sex shows. To keep the victims under control, the traffickers put a lot of pressure and threat on them. The TVPA (2008) identifies that traffickers use psychological, physical pressure and bondage to keep the victims under control. Psychological and physical abuse include treats of serious harm to or physical restraint against the victims, added to it they use scheme and pattern intended to bring the victims to believe that if they do not listen or fail in performing a task, the consequences would be in serious pain. The victims would be lie about the debt bondage, the trafficker will tell the victims about them owning a certain amount of money from the traveling and living expenses where they need to pay the dept in order to leave (ACF, 2008). The victims would be punished severely if they do not listen or try to escape. The traffickers will not care whether the victim is a lady or a child, whoever does not listen to them will be treated very badly, which includes beating, threats of violence, rape, starvation, forced drug use, isolation, intimidation and emotion manipulation. As the result, regardless of the

symptoms experienced the victims will usually have psychological problems; they tend to have low self-esteem and they are afraid of many things which prevent them from develop and reenter the society again once they escape or are rescued from the sex industry. For this reasons many shelters from both government and private have been built for the purpose of helping the victims to cope and start a new life. For instance, the main government shelter is Bahn Kredtrakarn, Bangkok; they can nurse up to 500 rescued victims (Arnold & Bertone, 2008). The shelters provide them a place to stay, food, medical care and counseling to recent rescued victims (ECPAT 30). They have psychologists to talk to the victims to try to help them out. Because they all went through tough time during trafficking situation, individual counseling will be given to take care of victims with emotional problems or mental health problem from the past trauma they experienced, the right appropriate treatment will be delivered depend on each individual (Arnold & Bertone, 2008). They try to help the victims to restore their mental well being and learn or develop skills to deal with their emotions and to adjust into the society later on, but it is also a challenge since there is lack of time, resources and money. Besides that, they will be taught basic skills like sewing, cooking or basket weaving so it may be easier for them to find a job in future.

2. 5 The Damages That Sex Tourism & Child Sex Tourism Cause.

As the demand increases, it involves a lot more younger girls since the buyers believe the younger the girl the less chance they would be infected

with sexually transmitted diseases. And in the vision of a client, a young girl presents innocence and vulnerability,