



Why Did You Not Report It?

An investigation of the roles of guilt, shame, and gender in the low reporting rates of sexual assault in Thailand's sex work industry.



Coralie Gauvin Bélair

BA International Development, King's
College London (2022)

BA Sociology, Minor in Women's
Studies, Laurentian University
(Canada)

Research Interests:

Human Rights
Women's Right
Modern Slavery

Blog: www.yearsofchange.com

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/coralie-belair

AGENDA



01

QUESTIONS

Questions that guided the research

02

DEFINITIONS

Exploring how definitions impact the reporting of sexual assault

03

SYSTEMIC FACTORS

To what extent do systemic factors impede the reporting of sexual assault?

04

GUILT AND SHAME

The impact of norm perceptions and self-perceptions in shame, guilt, and thus the reporting of rape.



01

QUESTIONS

1. How do definitions impact the reporting of rape and sexual assault in sex slavery?
 2. To what extent do Thai victims of sex slavery abstain from reporting their sexual assault due to systemic factors?
 3. How do norm perceptions and self-perceptions lead to feelings of guilt and shame, and how does this discourage victims from reporting their assault?
-
- 



“The most violent element in society is
ignorance.”

- Emma Goldman





Question One: How do definitions impact the reporting of rape and sexual assault in sex slavery?

Definitions

In order to report rape or a sexual assault, one has to be aware that it has occurred. This involves:

➤ **Definitions**

“b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs” (Walby et al., 2015)

➤ **Agency**– Sen’s concept of capacities (Sen, 2009) | Victims?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION



Why are girls in Thailand the predominant victims of sexual slavery in brothels? What systemic factors contribute to the reproduction of this gender inequality and human rights violation?



Achievement of Status



Agency | Freedoms



Gender



Question 2:

To what extent do Thai victims abstain from reporting their sexual assault due to systemic factors?

Systemic Factors



INSTITUTIONS

“significant **societal, legal and institutional** policies and practices that act as barriers to justice” (UN WOMEN, 2017)

“The woman working behind the noodle stall outside Siri’s brothel is also spy, warder, watchdog, procurer, and dinner-lady to Siri and the other twenty- four girls and women in the brothel.” (Bales, 2012)



But isn't this all illegal?

Yes. However;

- Accountability and Corruption
- Cultural/social acceptance of brothels as a service provider
- Child sex tourism; economic incentive to turn away from the problem

Thai Law:

- Sexual violence “including rape and other forms of sexual assault is often deemed socially acceptable, due to **entrenched social and cultural norms** that minimize the value of women’s roles and reinforce their status as subordinate to men”
- “prohibits the offender from being acquitted by claiming that an offender does not realize the fact that the child victim is not yet over 13 years of age”
- “around the region, **high societal tolerance** for sexual violence results in low reporting, high attrition, and individual and institutional biases against victims”

(UN WOMEN, 2017)



10-15%

Estimated to report sexual assault. Thus, sexual assault statistics are dark figures. (UN WOMEN, 2017)

We know that institutions impact the access to resources to report rape as well as the extent to which a victim fears being turned in, and the ease with which one can do this. But what about the individual's reasons in regards to their perception of the situation?





Question 3:

How do norm perceptions and self-perceptions lead to feelings of guilt and shame, and how does this discourage victims from reporting their assault?



“In Thailand, commonly held beliefs among both men and women include that the wife is the husband’s asset and that women out to obey men, as illustrated by the expression that women are the hind legs of the elephant following men’s front legs” (UN WOMEN, 2017)

Norm-Perceptions

- “beliefs about what others think and do, ...which behaviours are widely supported in our social networks” (Evans, 2018)
- “We further anticipate that we will be liked, accepted and respected according to the extent to which we conform to these norm perceptions, and so moderate our conduct. So, **even if we do not privately endorse these practices, we are nevertheless motivated to conform – because we do not wish to be reprimanded, reproached, or violently repressed.**” (Evans, 2018)
- Societies “predominantly patriarchal, marked by strict social norms related to women’s and men’s roles” (UN WOMEN, 2017)
- Unquestioned Acceptance of the Status Quo– Shame and Guilt if refusing to respect the status quo.

Self-Perceptions

- “‘Self-perceptions’ refer to how an individual sees themselves, e.g. as less competent or less deserving of status. These beliefs are learnt through direct observation, hegemonic discourses and media consumption.” (Evans, 2018)
- “The terrible things that happen to a person are, after all, of an individual’s own making, recompense for the sins of this life or previous lives” (Bales, 2012)
 - Shame and guilt from wrongdoings of previous life
- Shame: understanding is that this ordeal or future is expected, or even *earned*.
- “When I commented on how pretty she looked in a photograph, how like a pop star, she replied, “I’m no star; I’m just a whore, that’s all.” (n.p.) (Bales, 2012)
 - Thus, systemic factors are also directly *impact* self-perceptions: beliefs of low self-worth are reinforced by the system.

CONCLUSION

1. How do definitions impact the reporting of rape and sexual assault?
2. To what extent do Thai victims abstain from reporting their sexual assault due to systemic factors?
3. How do norm perceptions and self-perceptions lead to feelings of guilt and shame, and how does this discourage victims from reporting their assault?

Potential improvements

- Ethnographic research
 - Unstructured participant observation, interviews
 - Asking girls directly through interviews
- 

THANKS!

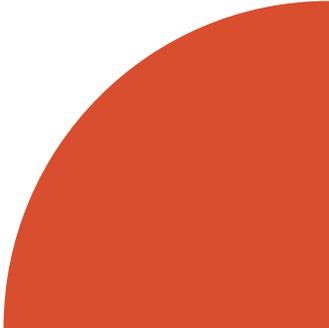
Questions?

cgbelair@gmail.com |
coralie.1.gauvin-belair@kcl.ac.uk

www.yearsofchange.com

(The presentation, including references, will be posted on the website shortly.)

www.linkedin.com/in/coralie-belair



References

Bales, K. (2012). Disposable people : New slavery in the global economy. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>

Campbell, G., & Elbourne, Elizabeth. (2014). Sex, power and slavery.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour" in *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*, pp. 200-206. © 2006 McGraw-Hill Humanities.

Evans, A (2018) Politicising Inequalities. *World Development* 110: 360-372.

Kabeer, N. (2006), Poverty, Social Exclusion and the MDGs: The Challenge of 'Durable Inequalities' in the Asian Context. *IDS Bulletin*, 37: 64-78. doi:10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00270.x

Leuchtag, A. (2003). "Human Rights, Sex Trafficking, and Prostitution." In *The Humanists* (63rd ed.).

Sen, A. K. (1999), 'Development as freedom', Anchor Books.

United Nations. (2015). Concepts of Inequality. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wess/wess_dev_issues/dsp_policy_01.pdf

UNDP, UN WOMEN. (2017) The Trial of Rape: Understanding the criminal justice system response to sexual violence in Thailand and Viet Nam. Retrieved from: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/09/the-trial-of-rape>

NISHIZAKI, Y. (2011). Prostitution and Female Leadership in Rural Thailand: The Story of Phayao Province. *Modern Asian Studies*, 45(6), 1535-1597. Retrieved October 15, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41330647>

Limpisawas, R. (1997). Thailand: Child Prostitution. *Off Our Backs*, 27(3), 11-11. Retrieved October 15, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20835778>

Montgomery, H. (2008). Buying Innocence: Child-Sex Tourists in Thailand. *Third World Quarterly*, 29(5), 903-917. Retrieved October 15, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20455082>