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## **“Voluntary” Transactional Sex of Female Children Above 15 years old: A Commonality in Thai society?<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Thai society has seen some Thai female adolescents aged 15 - 18 years old<sup>2</sup> voluntarily engage in transactional sex – in a form of an occasional sideline activity or in a long-term sexual relationship with (married) middle aged/older Thai men. This is done while also maintaining a separate relationship with their boyfriends. Some see this phenomenon as a form of commercial sexual exploitation of children. Others, however, see it as the adolescents taking advantage of ‘traditional authority’<sup>3</sup> for their financial advantages to meet a lifestyle promoted in a consumer culture. Others simply see it as a breakthrough social norms and values governing females’ sexuality while the adolescents also earn. This paper presents the voices of two female adolescents who have intimated experiences/knowledge on the matter when they were below 18 years of age. The article shows that although the right of the child to agency is to be nurtured and respected, it is equally important to remember that all adults have a duty to support the development of the child that is within their best interests. Furthermore, successful efforts to address the phenomenon require the society and all stakeholders to critically take into consideration on the fact that the supply simply cannot exist if there is no demand for it.

*Key words: demand for sex with children/ patriarchal social structure/ transactional sex of adolescents/ agency/ child rights*

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<sup>1</sup> This article is extracted/based on a Master’s Thesis, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Thailand. The author can be contacted on: kritsanapbkk@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this article, the word ‘children’ refer to those who are below 18 years of age, while the word ‘girls’, ‘adolescent(s)’ and ‘adolescent girl(s)’ specifically refers to female child whose age is between 15 – 18 years old and are used interchangeably.

<sup>3</sup> where males express their masculinity and economic power through having multiple sexual relationships with females

## Introduction

Although commercial sex is illegal in Thailand, it has been nonetheless visible in Thai society for decades. It is not only adults who are involved in commercial sex, but also children. Some children are forced, lured or coerced into commercial sex<sup>4</sup>, but some enter into it seemingly voluntarily. Some media and organisations working to combat commercial sex of children tend to ‘problematise stereotypes of children’s passivity and helplessness’ (Montgomery 2001) around victimization in various forms<sup>5</sup>, and that their entry into commercial sex is due to some desperate factors. Since it is deemed that it is not their fault to find themselves in such situations, these children commonly receive sympathy and support from the public and organizations working to protect children. In contrast, adolescent girls who voluntarily enter occasional transactional sex<sup>6</sup> or longer term transactional sexual relationship with middle aged/older men for financial benefits generally receive disapproval or are condemned as ‘bad’ girls.

Few studies and researches have challenged the stereotypes of children engaging in commercial sex. Montgomery’s research (2001), for example, draws attention to Thai children below 15 years old in a slum community voluntarily engaging in transactional sexual

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Commercial sex’ or ‘Prostitution’ refers to an ‘act of granting sexual access for payment [or in kind through a form of transaction]. Although most commonly conducted by females for males, it may be performed by females or males for either females or males’ (Source: <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Prostitution> [15 December 2015]). To avoid stigmatizing terminology that is generally perceived with the use of the term *prostitution*, the term *commercial sex* is generally used where appropriate.

<sup>5</sup> For example, through involvement of/procurement by their parents, being forced/coerced, being trafficked or ‘voluntarily’ entering into commercial sex to support their families that are in a great financial difficulty, etc

<sup>6</sup> based on the research on which this article is based, evidence suggests that adolescents, below 18 years old, who engage in some forms of commercial sex do not see themselves as involved in a form of prostitution. To acknowledge the complex phenomenon of adolescents engaging in a transactional sex without labelling them as being a prostitute, since they do not see themselves as such, the term ‘*transactional sex*’ is extensively used in this article to refer to sexual activity that involves a reciprocal arrangement, regardless whether the arrangement is made either explicitly or inexplicitly and whether it is acknowledged by either parties involved. For example, a form of sexual relationship between an adolescent girl and a middle aged/older man (men), or forms of occasional commercial sex with clients looking for sex as a so-called part-timer or a sideline girl, etc which in both instances are practiced by adolescents, including those who are below 18 years old and adults.

relationships with foreign adult clients to financially contribute to their families and proposes a solution that the issue needs to be recognized from economic rather than moral aspects. This research, similar to Montgomery's study (2001), focuses on transactional sexual relationships between Thai children and adults – but more specifically between adolescent girls aged above 15 years old voluntarily entering transactional sexual relationships with Thai middle aged/older men when they were below 18 years old (while also retaining the relationship with their boyfriends). While foreign men's demand for sex with children receives attention from the media, activists, law enforcement and the public<sup>7</sup> as 'child sex tourists', this is not the same for local men engaging in transactional sexual relationships with adolescent girls aged 15 to 18 years. As this article will demonstrate, the local demand for commercial or transactional sex with adolescent girls is inadequately recognized as a violation of the rights of the child in Thai patriarchal society. The article concludes by arguing that these adolescents are being exploited. Whilst they may not consider themselves as victims, the men are clearly taking advantage of them. This is not in the child's best interest so they should have access to protection and support services and the demand side should be more clearly targeted and addressed.

## **Methodology and Limitation of the research**

A qualitative study is employed as a research approach so as to enable adolescents 'to describe their views of reality' (Baxter and Jack 2008) from their perspectives and experiences. In this regard, examples, based on two young key informants' real life experiences and intimate knowledge on the issue while they were below 18 years old were applied. It is important to note that the participation of two young key informants is not in any way meant to claim to represent views of this group of adolescents in general. However, it is hoped that the depth and openness of the discussions shared by the two adolescents, the similarities of their views (despite differing contexts) can enrich a better understanding on their choices of action, factors that influenced their decisions to 'choose' to engage in a form

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<sup>7</sup> This may partially be due to the historical record of many Thai girls aged below 18 years old migrated from rural areas to big cities for work but were absorbed into the 'rest and recreation' sex industry created for foreigners – the so called USA 'military tourism' (Chang 2012) during the Vietnam War. Furthermore, it may also partially be due to the government policy to maintain revenue generated from the 'rest and recreation' facilities after the Vietnam War by merging prostitution into tourism (Levan 1994), which saw a prevalence of children involving in commercial sex in tourism industry in Asia (Srisang 1991).

of transactional sexual relationship, needs and dreams of this group of young people. The original study also enabled twenty-three adult key informants who work with children and adolescents on commercial sex or relevant issues to share their experiences and perspectives in the context of what some adults view as voluntary transactional sex of adolescents. Relevant secondary data<sup>8</sup> on transactional sex of children in Thai society also complimented the data collected through the field work and validates the analysis.

## **Exercising agency and self-determination or sexual liberalisation for financial benefits?**

### *Changes in cultural and social views of female sexuality and childhood*

Female sexuality in Thai society is governed and controlled by cultural and social norms under patriarchy<sup>9</sup>. However, the shift of the national economic strategy, as part of economic globalisation whereby consumption and competition is promoted, not only drives the country to economic prosperity but also brings changes to status of childhood and female sexuality. In a (consumerism) society where capital is the most sought for ‘survival’ need, girls’ roles in many households have shifted from an object of concern for protection and assistance of adults to become a provider for their families and for themselves; ‘childhood is gradually becoming liquidated’ (Matthews et.al. 2000). While many adolescent girls enter the world of work and are absorbed in industrial sectors, others are absorbed in service sectors, including sex services. Such situations are generally considered by child rights advocates as exploitation and a violation of human rights of the child. However, those girls (and sometimes their families) consider themselves as independent adolescents who have a capacity to provide and ‘who should be admired rather than pitied or patronised’ (Montgomery 2001).

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<sup>8</sup> academic articles, NGO reports, newspaper reports/articles and contents based on discussions via social medias. Whilst newspaper articles and text taken from social media may not be rigorously researched, the author provides them to illustrate public opinion on the issue

<sup>9</sup> being reserved in their sexuality and only expressing it in marriage; believing in a social division of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ females based on expressions of their sexuality; and believing in a need of men to release their sexual drive and have sexual variety (Knodel et.al 1996; Simpkins 1997; Grisurapong 2007; Piayura 2012)

In an attempt to prevent girls from poor families to fall into the sex industry, the government announced an increase of the years of compulsory education from six to nine years in 2000<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, it is reported (Taylor 2005) that the intervention helps reduce (rather than stop) numbers of girls entering sex industry.

*Children's agency and self-determination in the sex sector in a culture of consumerism*

As Thailand has moved from being agricultural economic-based to industrialization and a services economy, the country has greatly utilized advances in technology (internet, mobile phone and online applications, etc.) to stay competitively in global trades. The advances in communication technologies have also been widely utilized and popularized among adolescents (males and females) including open access to sexual information, an ability to freely connect, arrange or engage in sexual encounters via internet contributes to a sexual liberalization of female adolescents. Recent research on the effects of pornography exposure and sexual behaviour among university students (Seritanondh 2011)<sup>11</sup> indicates that over 50 percents of each group of students participating in the research access pornography via the internet from youtube, facebook and smartphones respectively. Male students access to pornography mostly at the age of 10-13 years old for entertainment, relieve stress and curiosity, while female students access to pornography mostly at the age of 14-16 years old for entertainment, curiosity and sexual knowledge. With regard to their sexual behaviours, 18 percent are reportedly able to control their sexual expressions, 28 percent have confidence in their gender and sexuality, and 35 percent used to sell sex which is the highest percentage. Such changes in the sexuality of female adolescents are observed by one adult key informant below:

*“Young people now are greatly influenced by the Internet – not only what they see on it – and there’s a lot of sexualized content – but also how they interact with others both in the virtual and real world. Social barriers and norms that were in place for our generation are no longer relevant to today’s youth”*

*(KII no.23, NGO staff, Bangkok, December 2014)*

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<sup>10</sup> At the time of writing, compulsory education is twelve years.

<sup>11</sup> The research participants include 600 students from governmental and private university, 298 male students and 302 female students who are in their first year to the most senior year (the 4<sup>th</sup> year of academic term)

Modern information and communication technologies do not only contribute to the liberalisation of girls' sexuality but also in the operational development of the sex industry. As such, the online environment has become a venue where the demand for sex with adolescent girls and the supply is met, hence, commercial sexual arrangements can be initiated, negotiated and arranged online. A recent study by Tangtammaruk (2014) finds that internet and online applications are utilized as market venues where arrangements, both for temporary and overnight sex services, can be made, in which high school girls are also found to use online venues to advertise their availabilities for commercial sex as sideline girls or part-timers or a freelancer.

*Taking risks in exchange for an increase of financial capacity within a consumer culture*

The capacity to consume is nowadays regarded as a measure to define the 'quality of life' and social status to many in Thai society, including among adolescents. While Thai law recognises the need of adolescents aged over 15 years old to enter a world of work in order to earn to support themselves and/or their families, nonetheless, Thai labour law specifies types of work, working hours and working environments suitable for children to be employed. However, lucrative earnings offered by some entertainment businesses see adolescent girls pulled into taking up employment that places them at risk of sexual harassment and seemingly increases their vulnerability to transactional sex. In this regard, 'Nong' and 'Muai'<sup>12</sup>, the two adolescents who participated in this study as young key informants shared their accounts below:

*"Well, I mean doing this [working as coyote dancer], the money is better but doing that [working in the Japanese restaurant] because it takes a month before getting paid. I earned around 9,000 baht a month from working in a Japanese restaurant, but working on this [coyote dancer] for 10 days I earned 10,000 baht to over 10,000 baht, including tips.*

*(Nong, aged 20 years old, coyote dancer and Dek-nang-drink waitress, started transactional sexual relationship with a man over 50 years old when she was 17, then currently with another man, aged nearly 50 years old, Chiang Rai, November 2014)*

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<sup>12</sup> Not their real nick-names

*“[...] At first I did not know how to do the dances, [...]. Since then, I was also approached to dance on the top of a big truck [...] and we got tips a lot”*

*(Muai, aged 20 years old, coyote dancer and Dek-nang-drink waitress, started transactional sexual relationship with a man over 30 years old when she was 15-16 years of age, then with another man aged 50 years old, Pattaya, December 2014)*

Nong and Muai both work as coyote dancers - a dancing job in which adolescent females are hired to dance in pubs or events to attract male customers. The work offers them lucrative earnings, plus tips from customers in a shorter time comparing to other employment available to them. Nong graduated at the compulsory educational level (junior high school level) which enabled her to be offered an employment in a Japanese restaurant. However, with the earnings of 9,000 baht/month<sup>13</sup> in the Japanese restaurant, she found it hard to stay on as she could easily earn even a bigger amount of money in a much shorter time by working as a coyote dancer. As for Muai, being unable to graduate at the compulsory educational level, choices of employment that offer market earnings and/or provide a prospect for career development seemed to be almost non-existent. As such, both Nong and Muai, decided to embark on a path of coyote dancer when they were below 18 years old, knowing that the work as a coyote dancer could place them at risk of being sexually harassed.

In the competitive market of capitalism, the youthfulness of adolescents has become a product of the entertainment businesses to attract male customers – a market strategy that capitalizes on the traditional view on sexuality in Thai patriarchy – that is a male has an ‘innate’ sexual drive that needs to be released and that a female is generally expected to be sexually submissive to the desire of males. Similarly, with the indirect encouragement from the establishments, the adolescents also utilize this arrangement to achieve a higher level of incomes by seemingly exercising their right to agency in capitalising on their sexual

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<sup>13</sup> This is a normal payment in the market; according to <http://www.careerjet.in.th>, dated 28 December 2015, a salary range of a waiter/waitress for restaurants and coffee shops is 7,000 – 15,000 baht/month. With this work, through her accumulating skills and work experience, she should have the potential opportunity to move up a career ladder within this sector or in a similar sector and earn more in future – perhaps to an estimated amount of 15,000 baht/month or more.



liberalisation with customers, e.g. performing a sexy dancing style, engaging in sexual playfulness with customers knowing they would experience sexual harassment in doing so, as further noted by one adult key informant below:

*“Children cannot work and earn in a normal way because nowadays those materials they want are very costly, e.g. mobile phones, brand named clothes and handbags, etc. The jobs that are available to children aged below 18 years old, however, only provide them very small earnings – only few thousands baht. This makes a huge monetary gap in comparing between what they can earn and the materials they want and that they will have to wait for a long time to save up their earnings. Also, children in the modern days tend to have a low endurance to withhold themselves from having what they want quickly and wait until they are able to save up the money for it.”*

*(KII no.11, Law Enforcer, Bangkok, November 2014)*

The sexuality of the adolescents becomes a *product* for consumption by men as well as a *product* for sale to gain financial benefits by the entertainment businesses and adolescents themselves. The commodification of female adolescents’ sexualisation to gain possible maximum capital are influenced by today’s more sexual liberalisation and ‘the culture of consumerism that is preoccupied with acquiring, consuming, and possessing materials, goods, and services, in short - things’ (Beabout and Echeverria 2002). Although Nong and Muai have a very different educational background and prospects of job opportunity, nonetheless they end up in a similar life path. As both adolescent girls venture to exercise their liberalizing sexuality required by their work<sup>14</sup>, they seem to gain confidence in their abilities to *take on* middle aged/older men by deciding to enter in transactional sexual relationships with them.

*“This kind of relationship<sup>15</sup> starts from the customers coming to pubs [where I work] to drink. [...] I know how to talk and what to do with customers, how to make them stay long and spend a lot of money on drinks so that they become my regular customers. [...] you*

<sup>14</sup> as a coyote dancer and a Dek-nang-drink waitress

<sup>15</sup> refers to transactional sexual relationship between girls and middle aged/older men

*must do whatever it takes to convince the customer that you don't have a husband, then the customer is likely to want to 'look after' [have a sexual relationship in a long term] you. Even though he already has a wife, he will still want to have you, want to 'look after' you. And you will have money coming to you every day; you must be able to do whatever it takes to have him in your hand. Make him be a regular customer here, and you will get all you want. You just talk sweetly to him, and you will get what you want."*

*(Muai)*

It must be emphasised that this research does not deny that poverty, lack of education or job opportunity, domestic violence, poor parenting skills and supervision all still play a role as a contributing factor in various degrees in leading adolescent girls to engage in transactional sex. As stated by Montgomery (2001), it is not sufficient to approach the issues of voluntarily transactional sex of children solely on a moral framework but also from the economic aspect (e.g. the right to work). In addition, the findings of this study further reveal that the context where these adolescent girls find themselves (e.g. a consumer culture and existing practices of sexuality in patriarchy society) also needs to be taken into account. As pointed out by Nagamatsu et.al 2013, '[e]arly adolescents are affected by various environmental influences when developing their values'. Hence, in a consumer culture whereby success in life is often defined by a capacity of individuals to consume, the girls thus take an opportunity to utilize their sexuality. Through their decision to engage in transactional sexual relationships with middle aged/older men, who mostly were customers of their workplace, financial benefits can potentially, quickly and continuously be expected while the men's sexual drive and men's desire to express their masculinity powers can also be satisfied.

Although unequal power in such adult – child sexual relationships is clearly presented due to the differences in age, social status and financial power, nonetheless, the adolescents are 'able to manipulate these men to some extent' (Montgomery 2001). As such, the adolescents do not see such engagement as them being involved in a form of commercial sex or as being victims of sexual exploitation. In fact, they have a sense of being in a control of the situation they are in and they often say that they made their own choice to enter into it for financial benefits. The accounts of Muai, shared below, sum up this point:

*“[...] Sometimes, I feel guilty for doing this [to him], but sometimes I don’t want to feel guilty forever. [...] I cannot ask him for a house, for a car because I am not his wife. Yes, I can ask for jewellery, rings, necklaces, etc but I don’t want to ask for things that much from him. It is because I am a child and still need to rely on him. Also, I’ve already committed a sin because I’ve lured him [to give things, money to me]. So, I don’t want my sin to increase [by luring him to give big and expensive stuff to me]; I want to do some good thing, so that when I die my sin and punishment could be reduced.”*

*(Muai)*

Through the reciprocal arrangement developed in the relationship, the adolescents, therefore, perceive that due to their negotiation power and possession of a *thing* that the men are after, they are the party who is gaining from the relationship – that is an increase in their economic capacities. In effect, they have managed to change their roles as being a child needing special protection to being a female who is taking charge of their own lives and destiny in the modern competitive world.

### **Exploitation versus voluntary aspects**

The issues of adolescents voluntarily engaging in the transactional sexual relationships leads to further debate. For example, some may question whether or not such reciprocal relationship between adolescent girls and middle aged/older men can be qualified as the adolescent girls being exploited by the middle aged/older men. This is because both parties voluntarily enter into such relationships and both parties also gain benefits from the relationship – that is the men gain sexual benefits from the girls while the girls gain financial benefits from the older men. In effect, the situation can be seen as ‘mutually advantageous’ (Mayer 2007) to both parties, therefore, an ‘accusation’ of the exploitation is unlikely to be true. Nonetheless, Mayer (2007) explains that ‘exploitation is wrong because it degrades its victims; they are treated as means, not ends.’ In this regard, some may further argue that both parties may treat each other as a means not an end anyway (that the relationship seems to be based on economic and sexual interests, rather than on a fully committed loving and caring relationship), therefore, the situation is still unlikely to be regarded as exploitation of the girls. In this regard, Mayer (2007) further points out a dimension of exploitation below:

‘In the literature on exploitation, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to the phenomenon of gain at another’s expense. Most of the emphasis has been placed on taking advantage, but taking advantage only becomes problematic when it results in gain at another’s expense. [...] But note that gain at another’s expense is not always wrong. [...] Gain at another’s expense, then, only becomes a wrongful gain when the loser suffers an *underserved* loss. The gainer violates a purported entitlement of the loser in order to gain, and it is this violation that makes the gain wrongful.’

(Mayer 2007)

In applying the concept of exploitation urged by Mayer (2007) above to the case of the transactional sexual relationships between adolescent girls and older men whereby the power that each party possess is greatly unequal, it appears that the situation leaves the girls with a future prospect that is worse off than she was before – and is considered as an *undeserved* loss to the girls. That is the youthfulness and beauty power possessed by the girls generally become less attractive to the older men as the time goes on and the girls become older. As the economic power of the men is likely to remain for longer, the older men are in a stronger position to develop a new transactional sexual relationship with other younger girls as and when they wish. The girls, therefore, are in the relationship with a constant feeling of insecurity for their future.

On the other hand, some argue that as the adolescents voluntarily engage in transactional sex without being physically ‘locked up and forced’ to provide sex services against their will, they also have the freedom of movement and are seemingly able to stop their engagement in such activity as and when they wish to do so. Therefore, their protection is not required. Furthermore, since it is the choice of the adolescents to go into the transactional sex, it could be argued that the limited resources, time and energy should be focused on those girls who are victims of child sex trafficking and therefore need assistance. In this regard, Bay-Cheng (2015, cited in Tolman et.al 2015) offers a definition of sexual agency that is ‘a ‘neoliberal construct’ [...]. the mandate of neoliberal sexual agency that positions girls’ sexuality as individualized choices that they make knowingly, over which they can and should exert control and thus for which they are held individually responsible’.

## **‘Bad girls’ or the demand for sex by ‘bad men’?**

Although the families of the girls may be condemned in relation to their daughters’ upbringing, the girls nonetheless are the ones who directly experience discrimination and stigmatization from the society as they are perceived as being well experienced and knowledgeable about sex (Montgomery 2001), as explained by one key informant:

*“Under patriarchal relationship [in Thai society] it is to be expected that the society in general would see these girls as ‘dek jai taek’,<sup>16</sup> since the society has already [for many long years] categorizes women as either a ‘good’ woman or a ‘bad’ woman. Therefore, those women [girls] who do not comply with the social standard that expects women to be [sexually] reserved would then be condemned. In patriarchal social structure, mothers are often the ones who reinforce this social standard [that governs women’s sexuality] to their daughters.”*

*(KII no.22, NGO staff, Bangkok, December 2014)*

While these adolescents are socially discriminated and stigmatized due to the divergence from cultural and social norms, their situation is regarded by some as a basic fact of life for certain groups of people in the (consumerism) society where capital is the most sought for ‘survival’ need. Hence, such social tolerance may contribute to the persistence of commercial sex of adolescents in Thai society. In this regard, it is imperatively important to remember that although adolescents have expressed their sexuality and exercised their sexual agency by going into the transactional sexual relationship and do not see themselves as victims waiting to be rescued, the fact of how they go into the situation does not make their situations become less exploitative than situations of girls who are lured or forced into commercial sex. As Gupta points out, based on an essay on ‘Feminism’ in the Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies by Clare Chambers, that:

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<sup>16</sup> A Thai word refers to a girl who is regarded as ‘promiscuous’ due to ‘having sex early [...] and knowledgeable about sex’ (Montgomery 2001)

“liberal capitalism is committed to what she calls the ‘fetishism of choice’. If women choose things that disadvantage them and entrench differences, it legitimates inequality because the inequality arises from the choices they make. The few women who do well out of the sex industry do not believe that their work entrenches inequality because it is freely chosen, because prostitution is seen as a liberation from the drudgery of cleaning jobs. Choice is their weapon against feminist objections. In their so-called free expression of their sexuality, they are challenging nothing in the neoliberal schema because the work reduces women to the status of meat and commodity”

(Gupta 2012)

Other activists who are adult key informants of this study further emphasized that regardless of the entry and the conduct of girls in the transactional sex, it should not be a debate when a child is a concerned party:

*“If we talk about rights, it is a duty of adults to consider whether or not the decision the child has made or is making is within the best interests of the child.”*

*(KII no.15, NGO staff, Chiang Rai, November 2014)*

The lack of concern towards these adolescents leads the general public to have a very limited knowledge of their needs - to negotiate and withstand the ups and downs, stigmatization and loneliness at different stages of their life. As explained by Dodsworth (2014), a ‘[sense of agency] is not fixed and will vary, as will a sense of victimhood [helplessness], for those involved in selling sex at various times in their lives’.

## **Conclusion**

In Thailand today, the reason of being in poverty which then pushes Thai children and adolescents to voluntarily enter into transactional sex seems to carry much less weight than before. Furthermore, forms of voluntary transactional sex of children and adolescents have changed – from providing transactional sex services under the control or supervision of an

owner(s) of a brothel to engaging in transactional sexual activities independently. This is done by the adolescents exercising their right to self-determination and sexual agency while utilizing their negotiation skills, wit and youthful age for financial benefits. In a world of consumerism, in order to meet their desire to earn large amounts of money quickly, the girls positively respond to social tolerance and patriarchal norms of the demand for sex of (middle-aged/older) men. They do not see themselves as being sexually exploited or involved in prostitution but being a gaining party in the relationship by utilising their charm to exploit the older men for 'quick and easy' money. For them, their agency is a testament to the right to make choices for their livelihoods with their own bodies. Thai society nonetheless needs to decide whether it is acceptable to see adolescents exercise their agency in such a form of sexual liberalisation by engaging in such a form of transactional sex, or whether it is actually adult local men sexually exploiting adolescents.

Whichever of the above positions is taken, there is clearly some significant form of exploitation is taking place in voluntary transactional sex of children and in such cases, it is hardly in the child's best interest. If these men are using their wealth and power to exploit the girls then the emphasis needs to be taken away from the girls (the supply side) being seen as 'troublemakers' or going against social and cultural norms to the demand side being clearly recognized as 'offenders'. This will, therefore, add a new imperative to tackling demand so that offenders can be stopped or discouraged. If there is no demand, the supply will no longer exist.

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