

Final Report
Child Sexual Exploitation Research, Thailand

Submitted to Plan (Thailand)

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27 April 2016

The views and interpretations in this report are those of the author
and do not necessarily reflect those of the **Plan Thailand**

Acknowledgement

The research team would like to thank all individuals who agreed to participate in this research conducted during 24 August 2015 to 30 April 2016. The Team wants to thank all of the key person interviewed in the two provinces visited that were engaged in the child protection who willingly offered their opinions and viewpoints on this issue.

The team is especially grateful to the Plan international for giving the opportunity to the team and financial support. The team also acknowledges the assistance of Khun Jiranuch Kong-nerm and the Plan Thailand team for their kind support throughout the study.

Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the workshop participants. We are very appreciative of the information and views we have gathered through their input.

We hope that this study captures the major findings, good practices, and recommendations that will help guide future work carried out in prevention and protection of exploitation of children activities and associated processes at the provincial and community level.

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April 27, 2016

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Abbreviations

ATP Committee	Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee
CMP Committee	Anti- Coordinating and Monitoring of Anti-Trafficking in Persons Performance Committee
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CSEC	Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution, child pornography And the Trafficking of children for sexual purposes
LAO	Local Administrative Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
MSDHS	Ministry of Social Development and Human Security
Provincial SDHS	Provincial Social Development and Human Security Office
OPP	Office of Promotion and Protection of Children, Youth, the Elderly and Vulnerable Groups
NOCH	National Operation Center on Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking
POCHT	Provincial Operation Center on Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking
THPH	Tambon Health Promotion Hospital

Definitions

According to section 4 of the Child Protection Act B.E. 2046 (2003), "**Child**" means a person under eighteen years of age, but not including a person those who becomes *sui juris* through marriage;

"**Street child/nomadic child**" means a child who has no parents or guardian or whose parents or guardian fails or is unable to raise child and, thus, causes the child to wander (from place to place); or a child having nomadic behavior which is risky to his or her safety (welfare);

"**Child in hardship condition**" means a child whose family is poor or whose parents are divorced or separated, abandoned or confined against their will, or a child whose responsibility in taking care of the family is beyond his or her age or ability, or a child who is unable to take care of his or her own self.

"**Child at risk of wrongdoing**" means a child having inappropriate behavior, a child who is likely to be induced to commit unlawful or immoral acts by a person for whom s/he works for or accompanies, or a child who lives in an environment or place which may induce such child to act in a disgraceful manner as prescribed by Ministerial Regulation.

"**Illegal care**" means the failure to raise, cultivate or develop a child in accordance with the minimum standards as described by Ministerial Regulation, and which poses a risk to the physical or mental condition of a child;

"**Abuse**" means any act or failure to act which causes a child to be deprived of liberty or to be in danger, physically or mentally, **any sexual abuse** to a child or any use of a child to act or behave in a way which is likely to harm the physical or mental condition of a child or is illegal or contrary to good morals, irrespective of the consent of the child.

According to General comment No. 13 (2011) of the United Nations, "violence" is understood to mean "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, physical force or power, threatened or actual against a child, by an individual or group resulting in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity" (multiple forms of violence).

According to Section 4 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E 2551 (2008), "**Exploitation**" means seeking benefits from the prostitution, production or distribution of pornographic materials, other forms of sexual exploitation, slavery, causing a person to beg, work in coerced labor or service, suffer coerced removal of organs for the purpose of trade, or suffer any other similar practices resulting in forced extortion, regardless of such person's consent.

According to ECPAT (n.d. and ECPAT, 2015), the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) consists of criminal practices that demean, degrade and threaten the physical and psychosocial integrity of children. These forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children include: 1) prostitution of children, 2) child pornography and 3) trafficking of children for sexual purposes. Other forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children include: 4) child sex tourism, 5) child marriage and forced marriage.

Executive Summary

The sexual exploitation of children is one form of human trafficking and is a domestic and international problem. There has been a limited number of studies of violence associated with the sexual exploitation of children, either indigenous or ethnic population groups. The purpose of the study is to better understand and analyze in-depth the indigenous child protection systems, processes and mechanisms in selected areas of two Lahu villages in Chiang Mai and in the vicinity of the Hua Lampong Railway Station in Bangkok. There are four major areas of investigation, including assessment of: 1) The current issue of sexual exploitation and trafficking in the geographical area; 2) The current governmental policies, practices and local child protection mechanisms to fight child sexual exploitation and abuse; 3) The involvement of public and private stakeholders with a special focus on multi-stakeholder cooperation; and 4) Mechanisms for public participation. This was a qualitative research study which included a review of relevant documentation, in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) with key informants. A total of 94 persons provided data through IDI and FGD. Moreover, a provincial workshop with 15 stakeholders from 12 agencies, was held in Chiang Mai Province, to validate the overall research findings and make recommendations to develop services in order to build coherent child protection systems

Nomadic children in Bangkok include long-term and short-term street youth. There are a variety of factors which lead children to leave their families for the street. There is no systematic data collected on the number of cases of sexual exploitation of children, regardless of whether the perpetrator is Thai or foreign. Factors and causes of the sexual exploitation of vulnerable children in the three study areas are related to: 1.) the policy, plans and implementation, 2.) the family customs and communities, 3.) child factors and 4.) the relevant agencies. The protection of children is based more on a criminal approach to suppression rather than pursuing social prevention (outreach) solutions. The MSDHS does not have a mechanism for advocacy at the district or community level. Corruption and law enforcement is a persistent obstacle to implementation and hard to eradicate. Another challenge and limitation in the community is the implementation of the suppression of drugs. The relevant community organizations and community residents don't have confidence that they or their family will be safe if they oppose the drug dealers. The main motivation for children to drop out of school and migrate is economic need related to family poverty and gender. Lack of life skills, participation in local customs, ignorance about reproductive health (RH) and RH rights, earlier marriage and childbearing, earlier divorce, and lack of citizenship can make them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Some aspects of customary law may violate the rights of children in various aspects. The local administrative organization staff do not have the relevant knowledge or outreach skills to establish links with the locals. The existing good practices in the study sites are: 1) Using sports to prevent and rehabilitate child/youth drug addicts. 2) Providing scholarships to keep children in school. 3) Curbside teachers; safe houses for street children, and street children's home.

Community outreach should be intensified in study villages in the form of action research. There needs to be a multidisciplinary approach and longer-term implementation (at least 5 to 10 years) with an emphasis on holistic strategies which are child-centered. There needs to be empowerment of children to know their rights, RH rights, and how to prevent and protect children from trafficking so that they know how to use RH services when appropriate, and understand how to take care of themselves. A community surveillance system should be established to be alert for dangers of human trafficking and sexual exploitation of children. There needs to be increased economic empowerment (alternative occupations) of the family. Participation in the local festivals and traditions should be based on beneficial aspects of spiritual beliefs and healthy community solidarity. Addressing the problem of drug abuse should be the role of agencies linked with the narcotics suppression authorities and the military.

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale

The sexual exploitation of children is one form of human trafficking and is a domestic and international problem. It is considered one of the worst forms of human rights violations, and undermines the structure and stability of society, the family and the lives of the victims. Thailand has taken a strong stand against human trafficking and the need to aggressively pursue prevention and suppression measures. During 1997 to the present, Thailand has convened multiple bi-lateral meetings with other countries in the region to address the problem of human trafficking. On April 3, 2015, the Prime Minister of Thailand, as chief policy spokesperson, entered “the prevention and suppression of human trafficking” as a national priority agenda (Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2015). Nevertheless, the 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report issued by the US Department of State downgraded Thailand from a Tier 2, to a Tier 3 country on their Watch List (indicating a worsening situation for human trafficking in Thailand). The potential consequences of the downgrade is an imposition of trade sanctions for such goods as shrimp and other seafood, based on the perception of persistent human trafficking of crew for boats in the deep-sea fishing sector (“Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing;” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, Media Center, 2015; U.S. Department of State, 2015). Accordingly, Thailand is intensifying its focus on illegal migrant labor from neighboring countries, many of whom come from minority groups, as victims of human trafficking into the fisheries sector of the Thai seafood industry.

There has been a limited number of studies of violence associated with the sexual exploitation of children, either indigenous or ethnic population groups. Studies are needed on the process in which children, especially those from indigenous populations, are drawn into trafficking networks for sexual exploitation, and define the relevant economic aspects, socio-cultural factors, and gender. This information will help inform improvements in the prevention and suppression of the problem in ways that meet the needs and are acceptable to the affected communities.

1.2 Objectives

The purpose of the study is to better understand and analyze in-depth the indigenous child protection systems, processes and mechanisms in selected areas of Chiang Mai and Bangkok. The primary target group for this research is the children and adolescents belonging to ethnic minorities in Chiang Mai Province. There are four major areas of investigation, including assessment of:

- 1) The current issue of sexual exploitation and trafficking in the geographical area;
- 2) The current governmental policies, practices and local child protection mechanisms to fight child sexual exploitation and abuse;
- 3) To involve public and private stakeholders with a special focus on multi-stakeholder cooperation; and
- 4) Define mechanisms for public participation.

1.3 Methodology

Method of the study

This was a qualitative research study which included a review of relevant documentation, in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) with key informants. Tools for data collection include data record forms, interview and discussion guidelines, and

observation. Respondents were selected by purposive sampling, and the target population was children from indigenous or ethnic groups in Chiang Mai and street children in the Hua Lampong (train station) area in Bangkok. A total of 94 persons provided data, including 42 children (17 males, 23 females and two transgender) in nine FGD and seven IDI. The remaining 52 respondents include 34 adult females and 18 adult males in ten FDG and 23 IDI. The adults worked in the central or provincial office of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS), the Royal Thai Police, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, schools, Tambon Health Promotion Hospitals (THPH), local administrative organizations (LAO), businesses and non-governmental organizations (NGO), and community residents and leaders. The duration of the study is from August 24, 2015 to April 30, 2016. Moreover, a provincial workshop with 15 stakeholders from 12 agencies, was held in Chiang Mai Province, to validate the overall research findings and make recommendations to develop services in order to build coherent child protection systems. Throughout the study, the research team received excellent coordination and participation from the Plan (Thailand) office.

Study site

After consultation with Plan (Thailand), two lower-income ethnic Lahu villages in two districts of Chiang Mai Province were selected as sites for the rural component. These villages are referred to as Ruam Jai Village 1 and Ruam Jai Village 2 (assumed names). These villages have had a history of children leaving their family and community to live elsewhere. For Bangkok, the research team coordinated with the Childline Thailand Foundation to locate the sample population in the vicinity of the Hua Lampong Railway Station.

Ethical issues

This research did not involve an intervention to affect the status of the respondents. The research team strictly complied with standard practices and principles related to Plan's code of conduct, child protection policy and procedures. The research team also strictly protected the rights of the study participants. Participation was totally voluntary, and parental/guardian consent was obtained for child respondents. For all participants, the study guaranteed informed consent, privacy and confidentiality of data.

Research Limitations

1. The research team was able to identify only one nomadic child in the Chiang Mai villages since the other nomadic children had not yet returned to the home community. Thus, this results in an imbalance of the experience of rural and urban samples;
2. Some of the relevant government agencies at the central level were undergoing restructuring during the period of the research study and this impeded the collection of data from these agencies;
3. The time to obtain the participation of some of the relevant government agencies took longer than planned. Some agencies did not allow their staff to participate in the study. Thus, the data set is incomplete for some intended key informants.

2. Findings

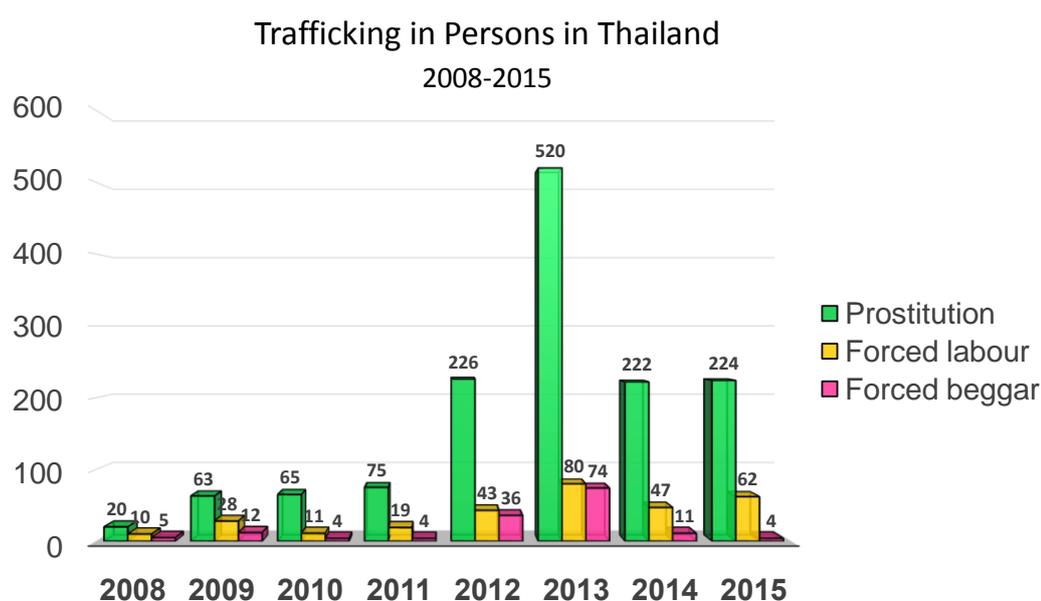
2.1 Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking in the Geographical area General Situation

All of the key informants in this study felt that, in general, sexual exploitation of children has declined significantly. Instead, the more common format for exploitation is through deception by enticement with the promise of easy money. Indeed, the recruiter is often someone the child knows and trusts; not a stranger, as in the past. The types of deception differ. *“Mostly, the deceiver is someone in the same village as the child, or even a trusted relative. S/he is someone the child is close to; not a stranger. That’s why the child readily agrees to accompany that person to travel outside the village.”* In other cases, the child is susceptible to peer pressure to enter commercial sex. They may see other youth gain extra income from selling sex which can be used for luxury consumption and travel. However, these youth do not consider the potential danger of doing so. This study did not identify many exploited children from indigenous or ethnic communities, including Chiang Mai.

Sex Tourism

Respondents who work in government agencies or NGOs which have programs to protect children reported that the persons who pay children for sex in Thailand are more likely to be Thai than foreign. That said, the police, Ministry of Tourism, the MSDHS, and NGOs admit that there is no systematic data collected on the number of cases of sexual exploitation of children, regardless of whether the perpetrator is Thai or foreign. This makes it difficult to assess the severity and trend of the problem. Even if data are compiled, the information is likely to be incomplete due to under-reporting, sporadic police crack-downs on procurers of child sex, etc. Data from the Anti-trafficking in Persons Division of the National Operation Center on Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking show that, during the period from 2008 to 2015, the most common violation concerns prostitution, followed by forced labor, and forced begging (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Trafficking of Persons in Thailand: 2008-15



Source: Anti-trafficking in persons division

Bangkok Street Children

Nomadic children in Bangkok include long-term and short-term street youth. There are a variety of factors which lead children to leave their families for the street including domestic strife, conflict with certain household members, or being neglected by a parent or parents. Some youth are drawn to an independent street life out of a sense of adventure and to see the

wider world. Others follow their own parents onto the street. A study by Tongphul and Waewrung (2015) found that the youngest, independent street children were age 10 to 11 years (male and female). Many leave school after completing the 5th grade, and more come from provinces outside of Bangkok than locally. The children have a loosely-structured routine of activity, depending on the locality, and their behavior and appearance can seem chaotic. The Hua Lampong train station is an important transit point for nomadic children from the provinces since trains from all regions of the country terminate there. Thus, the train station area has a mixture of newly-arriving and veteran street children. These children are most visible in that area during the hours of noon to 8 p.m. since that is when most of the trains arrive. The youth make pocket money by redeeming discarded bottles and other recyclable refuse from the trains. Some programs have actually set up temporary classrooms on the empty trains to provide continuing education and outreach to these street children.

From the hours of 8 p.m. to 3 a.m. the activity of the street children shifts to the Patpong entertainment area. Some children beg, sell sex, or deliver drugs. After 3 a.m. the children return to sleep in groups under the Thai-Belgium Bridge on Rama IV Road. Another popular site for street youth is around the Chao Por Shrine in the Bang Khae neighborhood. In that site, children can be found during noon to 8 p.m. begging, selling goods, or collecting recyclable goods, among other activities. Another area where Bangkok street youth congregate is the Bang Kapi neighborhood, during the hours of 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The children who populate these sites comprise heterosexual boys and girls, gays and transgender (TG) populations, and come from provinces throughout Thailand. The format for selling sex has been evolving over time. At present, most youth who sell sex have smart phones, and connect with customers via the Line software application. This has greatly increased the convenience for buyer and seller of child sex, and eliminates the need for a pimp or other go-between. The sex may take place in the residence of the buyer, not a motel. Even so, this arrangement still poses a risk for the child of being cheated out of the fee for sex, or being pressured to take drugs provided by the customer (e.g., 'Ice'). This can lead the child into a life of drug addiction and pursuit of income from drug dealing. The children admit they would rather work in a factory or other occupation than selling sex or drugs, but they are not eligible to apply since the minimum educational requirement is usually completion of lower high school (M3) which none has. *"At least I can make decent money this way."* Even some children who live at home are still lured into free-lance commercial sex due to the temptation of easy money. One 14 year-old TG youth first sold sex at age 11 years. Initially, the fee per episode of sex was 300 – 400 baht, but now s/he charges 800 baht. S/he reported that foreign customers pay more than Thais, and customers range widely in age: *"I ended up selling sex because I didn't study high enough in school to have a proper job."* Some NGOs provide free condoms to these youth to at least protect them from sexually transmitted infections (STI).

Chiang Mai: Lahu Indigenous or Ethnic Communities

Ruam Jai Village 1 is located about 150 km from Chiang Mai City, and it takes 3.5 hours to make the trip, one way. The village is 80 km from the district capital. The village is located in a mountainous border area of mixed forest at 1,000 km above sea level. The access road to the village is paved but has over 100 curves (when driving from Chiang Mai City). The village has electricity but not all households are connected to the grid. There are 605 households in the village with a population of 1,284 males and 1,235 females. The standard of living is below average but there are two primary schools and one lower high school serving the village. Average annual household income is 35,780 baht or about US\$ 85 per month. Most (70%) of the villagers are farmers (rice, cash crops and garden vegetables), and

20% are wage laborers. The village has a THPH and a Highways Development Center in its vicinity.

Ruam Jai Village 2 is similar to its counterpart. Most residents are farmers while some gain income from wage labor. Average monthly household income is US\$ 114. This village has easier access to the outside world since it is located next to a national highway. Thus, the villagers have more contact with the cities and show more urban styles of living than villagers in Ruam Jai 1. This village has a Tambon (sub-district) Non-formal and Informal Education Center, and a high school is within ten km. Parents want their children to continue in school at least through the mandatory 9th grade, and many hope their child(ren) will go to college and have a good occupation. These high educational aspirations may be attributable to one well-known villager who completed a master's degree and is now a professor at a well-known university.

Traditional Courtship Dance and Rituals

Both study villages continue the traditions of their ancestors, for example, by speaking in the Lahu language within the family. The younger generation is more fluent in Thai than their parents because of higher educational attainment. Communities in both villages still practice the 'Kinwor' over a seven-day period once a year, including the 'Jakeu' courtship dance which takes place from night until dawn. The dance allows male and female youth to become more acquainted and intimate. There is no lower age limit for participation. A male and female youth who feel a romantic attraction to each other may then proceed to spend the night together, including having sex. However, the male partner must then seek his partner's hand in marriage and pay the requisite bride price to her family. In some cases, males from other villages may be allowed to attend the dance.

Lahu Religious Practices

Most of the residents of both villages practice the Lahu version of Buddhism (which has certain animist traditions). The spiritual leader is called a 'Tobo' and presides over the Haw Yae ceremony, which is analogous to a communal church convocation. Both villages have some Christians who attend church on Sundays. Each village has a Buddhist monastery with a resident abbot. The monastery is also a sanctuary for orphans and, at the time of this study, there were 24 orphans living in the monasteries.

Drug Addiction

Despite their different locations and accessibility, both villages have problems of drug addiction of its residents. While this is widely known in the community, no one wants to complain about it openly out of fear of reprisals from the drug dealers. In Ruam Jai 1, there is a cluster of houses which serve as drug trading posts. It is estimated that at least half the households have someone involved in drugs. Children with drug-addicted parents often become addicts themselves. During the process of data collection a former staff of the local THPH was executed, presumably for his involvement in the drug trade. The team was not able to collect data on the prevalence of drug addiction in Ruam Jai 2, but local residents said they were strongly opposed to drug use and wanted to see strict suppression measures. However, at present, they lack the means to prevent inroads by the drug dealers and can only watch and despair as use spreads. Even though the prevalence and threat of the drug epidemic is apparent to residents and government officers, there is a reluctance to discuss the issue. In other words, the fear of reprisals is greater than the concern for the negative impact of drugs on children and youth in the community.

Children Suffer the Consequences of Drug Abuse in the Household

There are a number of families in the study villages in which both parents are drug addicts. One consequence is the lack of attention to raising their child(ren). One boy in the 5th grade and his younger sister (age 9) live in poverty because their parents do not own their land and

must harvest corn of other farmers to earn income. To make matters worse, the parents are addicted to drugs and, thus, sometimes the two children have to go beg for a meal from the local monastery, since no meals are prepared at home when the mother is high. One village girl had to drop out of the 3rd year of high school (at age 15) to help support the family since her father was an unemployed drug addict and the mother had a disability which prevented her from working.

Impact on Education: Students and Teachers

The trend in both villages is for the majority (80%) of youth to drop out of school after completing the 6th grade in order to seek employment. Others may continue on to high school but drop out before completing the compulsory 9th grade. This practice is so common that residents take it for granted (that youth will not complete high school). Even the teachers are complacent about this problem and see no need to motivate students to remain in school. Out of 13 male youth in this study, ten were sub-literate; only three were reading at their grade level. Females were more functionally literate but had difficulty retaining course content. Part of the problem is sub-standard instruction, lack of teacher diligence, harsh language of teachers toward students, and student embarrassment in not being as fluent in Thai as their peers. Some teachers did not understand the Lahu dialect, thus preventing them from bridging the communication gap, especially among the early primary students. These and other factors lead many students to drop out. This also reflects a lack of interest of the community and parents in promoting the education of their youth. From observations by the research team, it seems that many children in these communities have retarded development, and this is also observed among the nomadic children living on the streets. These youth have short attention spans, and that impedes learning (according to one outreach teacher).

If the School is Outside the Home Community, the More Risk of Harm or

Truancy

When the school is 4 km from the community, many students have to walk to and from school on the highway. Usually, there are few households along the way, and this poses a particular threat for younger female students who may be at risk of assault or abduction. In other cases, some youth may choose to skip school and return home in the afternoon without their parents' knowledge.

Neglected or Abandoned Children, Orphans at the Monastery

In Ruam Jai 1, there are still two orphanages with 100 children, and about 70% of them are undocumented. Some of these orphans become street children. Some come from very poor families in which the parents cannot properly care for them, or have divorced/separated. The grandparents do not have the means to take over the parenting role. Thus, these children end up at the orphanage. Being undocumented, these orphans cannot exercise their rights as Thai citizens (to access public education, health care, etc.). In one housing cluster in Ruam Jai 1, the research team learned that there are 35 children/youth who have been abandoned by their parents or are orphans. The abbot of the monastery which houses these youth is 80 years old. Thus, the children do not have a reliable source of care and are vulnerable to human trafficking schemes or drug abuse. These children appear sad and lonely out of a lack of loving parents. The families near the monastery are sympathetic to the plight of these children but, because of the general level of poverty, cannot provide much assistance. It is not clear who will care for these children if the abbot dies. Some children still live at home but are neglected because their parents spend long hours in the fields or work outside the village in wage-labor jobs. In Ruam Jai 2, the research team found ten youth age 7 to 11 years who were playing cards in households without adults present.

Violation of Rights and Sexual Exploitation

Ruam Jai 1 Village has a history of at least three girls being sexually violated. The first case involved multiple rape by a male youth from a neighboring village. Another case was that of

a 14 year-old girl who was raped when she went out for an evening stroll alone. The third case was a 13 year-old girl was contacted by a youth from a neighboring village via Facebook and was lured to a setting in which she was gang raped. One 13 year-old girl went to Chonburi Province to assist an aunt who was a merchant there. She was raped by the aunt's husband (age 37) and actually became pregnant by him.

To address the first three cases, the community used a negotiation among victim and perpetrator families, presided over by a community council. In the first case, the male youth admitted to the violation but the girl was too shy to verify the accusation. Thus, the rapist could not be punished. In the second case, the female victim was confident enough to accuse the perpetrator and demand compensation of US\$5,000 (which was negotiated down to half that amount). In the third case of gang rape, the village council was able to track down only one of the rapists, who was charged with a US\$5,000 fine. The male youth did not have the resources to pay that amount and fled the locality. In the case of the girl impregnated by her aunt's husband, the aunt filed for divorce and the girl continued to live with her rapist. The key informants in the village did not know what happened to the girl after that.

The community-based mediation process used by the Ruam Jai villages is a form of 'customary law'. If the rapist agrees to marry the girl victim, then a reduced fine is assessed. If he refuses to wed the victim, then the rapist must pay full compensation as assessed by the community council. If the rapist does not pay the fine then he is expelled from the village; although this does not have much impact in most cases since the rapist usually comes from another community than that of the victim.

Each housing cluster in the village has its own 'block' committee and committee chairperson. As in other Thai villages, there is a single village headperson (formal leader). This leader is elected by the community, and a Thai government agency appoints that person as village headperson. However, in Lahu villages, there may be multiple housing cluster committee chairpersons who exercise local authority as informal leaders. These leaders are responsible for looking after residents in the cluster, and the formal village headperson cannot intervene if there is a dispute. Thus, the village headperson's ability to protect the rights of all villagers is somewhat limited.

The effect of resolving these cases of sex rights violations at the village level means there will be no official report of the crime, and the female victim will not receive a physical examination to assess the health consequences of the crime. The community council feels that health issues are outside its domain or are superficial: *"Just looking at the rapist you can tell he had no disease."* If the parents of the victim are not satisfied with the community council judgment, then they can report the crime to the police. However, in the past, there have not been any cases of rape reported to the police, even when the rapist has fled the locality. Thus, the police and other government agencies will not have any report of what occurred, or simply know of the event by hearsay but without evidence. The Chiang Mai Children's Shelter said they never heard of a case of an ethnic minority victim seeking care for a sex violation. What is more, the village councilors are all men, and when the fine is paid, it is divided as follows: (1) Compensation for the council; (2) Compensation for the parents/guardian of the victim; (3) Distribution of the balance for each house in the cluster where the victim lives.

Customary Law: Child Abuse

The household cluster committee resolution of conflict is a form of customary law and thwarts the application of the National Child Protection Act (2003) and the Anti-Human

Trafficking Law (2008). There is a conflict of interest among the parents/guardian of the victim, the committee and the family to prosecute the rapist since they stand to gain financial benefit from mediation. Further, the mediation process does not address the physical and emotional needs of the child victim. This constitutes neglect or negligent treatment of the child and can be considered abusive.

The research team conducted interviews with house cluster committee members (all male). It was clear that these committeemen have little understanding of the potential physical and psycho-emotional harm that rape could produce in a child. This ignorance translates into little motivation to take the child victim to the hospital to test for exposure to HIV, other STI, or unwanted pregnancy, and screening for mental health impact. The use of customary law in these situations denies the child victim their legal protections, welfare, care and rehabilitation (physical and mental) as appropriate.

Trafficking of Children to Malaysia

Residents of Ruam Jai 1 and NGO staff described cases of local girls who had been trafficked to Malaysia for commercial sex and had returned to the home village. The community felt it was a success story because the girl returned with considerable wealth, as evidenced by her family's new home, motor vehicle, fine clothes, etc. This created demand to send other girls to try the same fast track to riches. The first girl who had done the Malaysia trip and returned, then became a recruiter and motivator for younger girls to do as she did. She also facilitated their travel to Malaysia. However, to save face, the recruiter used deception in this process by saying that the job in Malaysia was as a waitress in a restaurant. In fact, the parents/guardians suspected that the girl's wealth came from something more than waitressing (i.e., commercial sex). Even so, this did not deter the families from encouraging their daughters to make the trip. For the younger girls, an agent would meet them at the home village to accompanying them to Malaysia. Older girls could make the trip on their own in one of the following ways:

1. Someone who is already in Malaysia comes to the home village to accompanying the new recruit;
2. Follow written instructions on how to travel to Malaysia, and then call a local number after arrival to arrange pick up;
3. Travel to meet a relative at some rendezvous point in Thailand and then continue together to Malaysia.

In most cases of independent travelers, the young women took a bus from Chiang Mai City directly to Songkhla Province in the South of Thailand, and then proceed by land to Malaysia. There were no reports of women flying to Malaysia for this purpose. When the women arrive at Malaysian Immigration, they request entry for tourism (i.e., not for work). The Immigration officers usually ask to see evidence of financial security (e.g., cash on-hand); but this requirement can be circumvented by the assistance of money-lenders who provide cash to these women before Immigration processing, and then retrieve the loan repayment soon after entry. Most of these Thai women then proceed to jobs in bars as hostesses and sex workers.

The Children and Communities are Ignorant of Reproductive Health (RH) and RH Rights

In Ruam Jai 1 and 2 Villages, the children do not understand RH, and many of the village women experienced their first pregnancy when in their teens. The schools do not cover this until the later grades of high school, and Lahu families do not discuss RH in the household: *"Some people are still puzzled by reproduction...some youth still have not made the connection between sex and pregnancy...it's amazing."* Even the adults lack knowledge and

understanding about RH and RH rights. The fact that the community committees do not see the need to take victims of rape to the hospital is a blatant indication of this ignorance.

Gender Inequity and Improper Child Rearing Practices

Lahu households are mostly extended families; there are few nuclear families. There is one head of household, usually a male, and that person has dictatorial authority over other members. The culture is patriarchal in that a man's son-in-law becomes head of household if the man dies (i.e., not his wife; Suthilak, 2011). This male domination has been passed down through countless generations. The research in these two villages found that the Lahu people expect daughters to perform house work more than sons. Similarly, male children have more independence than their female counterparts. When she reaches adolescence, the Lahu female is warned by her mother and grandmother to protect herself, to avoid being in places alone, to abstain from alcohol, and avoid being touched by others. Often, these warnings are expressed as taboo behaviors, especially during festivals when male youth from other villages visit and may try to take advantage of girls. By contrast, there is no family education of male children how to behavior properly toward the other sex. Thus, there is a clear double standard in Lahu culture in the treatment and expectations for girls and boys. For their part, male adolescents are warned only about the dangers of drugs; they are given freedom to explore sexual conquest on their own. Thus, the burden of responsible sexual decisions rests solely on the female.

In addition, Lahu female adolescents are expected to help support the household financially more than their male counterparts. In both study villages, male youth have more free time. This idleness leads some boys to experiment with drugs to ease the boredom. By contrast, female adolescents and girls have little time outside of school since they are tasked with household chores, minding their younger siblings and preparing meals. Lahu children are expected to listen to and obey their parents without the ability to express a difference of opinion. The culture tolerates the use of harsh language by parents/guardians when scolding their children. It is also acceptable to use physical punishment to discipline a child. This strictness eases somewhat when the child enters adolescence, and discipline is more by verbal warning than physical force. This pattern of child-rearing is similar to that traditionally practiced by mainstream Thai families. That is, Thai parents don't feel they should have to explain why the child's behavior is wrong, or to discuss the issue and allow the child to explain their viewpoint. This reflects a general lack of skill in positive communication and respect for the child's opinion in Thailand today. There is an urgent need to address this shortcoming and increase the parent-child communication skills. It is noteworthy that, even in the conservative Lahu communities, the Christian parents are more compassionate in raising their children.

Poverty and Pressure for Children to Enter the Workforce

This research did not find any case of parents selling their child into the workforce. However, there were cases of both male and female youth in low-income households who voluntarily discontinued their formal education after completing the 6th grade in order to earn income for the family. Indeed, the parents are pleased when their child makes this sacrifice. Accordingly, the primary reason for school drop-out is family poverty. When explored further in-depth, the parents even encourage this exploitation of their children to lessen the family's poverty. It does not matter whether the child voluntarily leaves school or the parents view this as an acceptable sacrifice for the family; it is still a form of child exploitation. This study also found that most of the youth who drop out for work seek employment outside the home community and as far away as Chiang Mai, Bangkok or other provinces. The youth help relatives to sell sushi, or work in restaurants, Karaoke lounges, beauty salons, shrimp farms, or tending football pitches, among other wage-labor jobs.

Child-sex Tourism

This research did not identify any cases of tourists going into Lahu communities to buy sex with children. However, some key informants insisted that there are some Thai and foreign tourists who come to the province expressly to have sex with underage partners or to take pornographic pictures of children. The street children and nomadic children report selling sex to both Thai and foreign customers, and contact is made through social media channels and smart phones. In this sense, commercial sex is evolving away from brothels or venue-based establishments to more free-lance direct contact between customer and provider. In Bangkok, massage parlors remain a popular front for commercial sex, whose clientele include Thais, Koreans, Japanese, and Chinese patrons. In particular, Chinese customers are on the rise given the increased travel links between mainland China and Thailand. Nevertheless, there remain cases in which girls are recruited into waitress/hostess jobs but are paid so low that they are virtually compelled to freelance in commercial sex to make ends meet. As noted earlier, no agency has a database on the number and nationality of child-sex tourists. Thus, it is not possible to say whether the trend is declining or increasing.

Traditional Culture, Customs and Vulnerability of Children

The Lahu tradition of the Jakeu Dance as a form of customary law was traditionally intended only for adolescents residing within the community. However, the current trend is to encourage outside visitors as a way of commercializing this event and earning income for the community (province and country). If this practice continues to expand outside the traditional setting, with the associated controls and community responsibility, then it is likely to contribute to further exploitation of youth and girls. Outside men and male youth may come to view this Jakeu Dance as an opportunity for sex with underage partners without the risk of being held accountable. Others may see the Dance as an opportunity to recruit a child into prostitution or other forced labor by having sex with him/her and paying off the parents to release the child to the rapist. This would severely compound the inhumane treatment of the child.

As this study has documented, traditional communities are ignorant of formal law regarding sexual violations, and this can deny the child their right to protection and treatment for physical or emotional injury as a result of rape. To procure evidence of the rape, a victim needs to receive a medical evaluation as soon as possible after the event (i.e., within 24 hours), regardless of whether a decision has been made to file a criminal complaint or not. Further, the victim and parents need to know that the child should not shower, bathe or wash the area of sexual penetration, since that may wash away or distort evidence. The evidence can be stored over time in the event the family needs time to consider whether to press charges. The victim also needs to receive treatment for STIs and prevention of pregnancy within 48 hours of the rape.

Child victims of rape should receive emotional counseling, positive reinforcement and, sometimes, protection from parents themselves. Unfortunately, some parents react negatively toward their child if they are raped, and even beat the child to determine the details of the rape. This may be in part a result of the shame the parents feel, or that they will be blamed by the community for not protecting their child. But taking this shame out by punishing the child only worsens the trauma of the rape for the victim. Eventually, the child may come to believe that the rape was their fault and not the wrongdoing of the rapist.

Customary Law is Not Keeping Up with the Times

Local traditions and customs are designed to be enforced with members within a housing cluster or ethnic/indigenous community. These customary laws are accepted without question by the community because they have been passed down through many generations.

However, this research found that these laws are not enforceable to those from outside the community who commit an offense in the village, even if they are from the same ethnic group. Further, it is difficult to apprehend an outsider who flees the village after committing an offense, even if it is known where they come from. Thus, it is increasingly important for traditional communities to examine whether their customary laws are still appropriate in today's rapidly changing society. To be a just society, all residents of Thailand need to abide by the national laws.

The Agencies which Provide Child Protection Services are Far Away from the Community

Lack of reporting of a crime to the police is often thwarted by the practice of customary law. But, in addition, families which may wish to file a criminal complaint may be deterred by the long distance to the nearest police station and the time and expense of travelling there. This also applies to seeking services from the nearest hospital which is equipped to do the proper examination (usually a district or provincial hospital). Most of the households in these ethnic communities are lower-income and may not be able or willing to afford the cost of visiting multiple assistance agencies in different cities and towns. Many families do not have private transport as well.

The Tourism Industry and Prevention and Response to the Problem

The Ministry of Tourism and Sports is one of the members of the National Committee for the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking. This Ministry has many agencies relevant to this issue, such as the Bureau of Tourism and the Tourist Organization of Thailand. However, so far, there have been no programs to combat the problem of child-sex tourism and exploitation.

“The Ministry of Tourism may view that its primary responsibility is to the general population of tourists, which is the vast majority of visitors to the country. Also, there is pressure to increase the number of tourists to the country. Still, it is understood that they also have a responsibility to protect Thai children from exploitation related to the tourism industry....they need to be more involved in prevention.”

Representatives from agencies related to tourism observed that *“Campaigns to combat sexual violations of children should be integrated for target audiences of Thais as well as foreign visitors. Messages and media should be in multiple languages and not isolate the tourists for blame. Instead, the message should be that the country has laws and sanctions (against child exploitation). The campaign should not make it seem as if all tourists seek to exploit children.”*

Impact of Social Media

At present, social media is spreading rapidly in all parts of Thailand, including the two Lahu communities in this study. Ruam Jai 2 Village has more active use of social media than Ruam Jai 1, perhaps because of its location near the highway and proximity to the district capital. Thus, Ruam Jai 2 residents have more convenient access to modern technology in the district town shops. Male and female youth can easily take local buses to town to view the latest products and trends in IT. Many Lahu youth have Facebook accounts, and those with smart phones use the Line application software. Although the youth say they use social media to link with friends, it is certain that many youth also connect with strangers through these channels to increase their network size. The concern with this is that naïve youth do not understand the dangers of social media when they first become involved, and haven't learned the skills to discern the motives of the strangers they link up with. This study did not identify any case in Ruam Jai 2 of a child who was a victim of sexual exploitation via social media. However, the duration of field work was short, and it is not possible to say that exploitation would not occur at a later time. Indeed, the youth in these Lahu villages would seem to be especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation or commercial sex overtures via social

media, either intentionally or through deception (e.g., the case of the girl in Ruam Jai 1 who was lured to a secluded location via Facebook and was gang raped). Thus, children need to be educated about these dangers and acquire skills to screen new contacts on social media.

2.2 Government Policies, Practice and Child Protection Mechanisms

Policy, Plans, and Implementation

Thailand has been continuously trying to improve its policy and planning related to child protection, not only for Thai children but all children resident in the country. There remain challenges in advancing policy and plans and enforcement of existing laws due to budget limitations, limited staff, lack of adequate knowledge and expertise of officials, and corruption. The Tier 3 classification of Thailand related human trafficking has spurred the government to intensify measures to reduce the prevalence of this practice, with an emphasis on exploitation of migrant laborers from Thailand's three lower-income neighbors. Poverty and remoteness from the mainstream economy pushes many young people into occupations where they can be easily exploited, especially those who enter Thailand illegally, and ethnic minorities. The number of vulnerable people is large and increasing while staff and budget to combat trafficking remains inadequate.

Child Protection Mechanisms

The Thai Cabinet passed a resolution on June 14, 2015 to set up Operation Centers on Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking at the national, provincial, and international levels. The objective is to develop mechanisms for central coordination and integration of data, services and other interventions related to human trafficking across all relevant government agencies. The improved data collection and analysis should help decision-making at the policy level. The structure of this collaboration is through the National Operation Center on Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking (NOCHT) and the Provincial Operation Center on Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking (POCHT). The Anti-Human Trafficking Law (2008) is a national mechanism for action which is overseen by the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee (ATP) and the Coordinating and Monitoring of Anti-Trafficking in Persons Performance Committee (CMP). The committees are chaired by the Prime Minister and Deputy-Prime Minister, respectively (MSDHS, 2011). The CMP has appointed sub-committees at the provincial level for Thailand's 75 provinces to serve as coordination centers at that level, and facilitate, direct and implement interventions related to suppression of human trafficking.

In addition, the Child Protection Act (2003) created the National Child Protection Committee (chaired by the Minister of the MSDHS), and the Bangkok Child Protection Committee (chaired by the Bangkok governor), and the 75 Provincial Child Protection Committees (chaired by the provincial governor).

At the provincial level, NGOs can play a role in policy advocacy by virtue of their membership on the CMP and child protection subcommittees. Often the same people are members of both committees and represent a multi-disciplinary mixture of experience and skills. The committees link with non-formal teams at the provincial level comprised of police investigators, staff of children's and family shelters, and NGO clinics, among others. These colleagues brainstorm together to address problems faced by various agencies in combatting child rights violations. The committees and their associates hold case conferences for complex situations, and convene ad hoc meetings of the most relevant individuals to review

the case. For example, if the case involves a student, then the meeting will include teachers from the relevant school.

Mechanisms and process of protection children outside the home community

The system for protection of children in the two study communities is not very clear or concrete. There is no local structure for protecting the child. This area of Chiang Mai is new terrain for Plan (Thailand), and development activities are at an early stage. The plan is to first set up a community child protection committee. However, this could be a challenge since the existing community committees do not see child protection as a priority issue. Also, community management is fragmented into the household cluster system. Thus, even though there might be a young and motivated village headman, the heads of each cluster committee have comparable authority through the informal system. These committee leaders are usually quite conservative, and adhere strongly to old traditions. In addition, some of these cluster leaders or their relatives actually benefit from the drug trade and, thus, represent a force against suppression or protection of children from drug abuse. Staff from the relevant government agencies for child protection have not reached these villages yet in any meaningful way. Staff of the local THPH felt that the Hotline One Stop Crisis Center (#1300) of the MSDHS actually should be managed by the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH). The staff said that no one uses the hotline: *“This should be the responsibility of the MOPH. I don’t know who is managing this service. The hotline should be for all forms of abuse and not just rape. But there has never been any orientation or training in the hotline service.”*

There are some indications of progress in Ruam Jai 2 Village, stemming from inputs from Plan (Thailand). The project has established a group of mother volunteers to serve as peer educators on how to raise a child during the ages of 0 to 3 years. The project also provides basic orientation to the peer leaders on legal issues related to child protection. In addition, Plan staff have coordinated with the Fang District Juvenile Center to conduct training of staff in child rights and protections. Ruam Jai 2 Village had participated in the CHILDLIFE Project (supported by the Global Fund) which included the creation of Child Action Groups (CAG) at the Tambon level. Some members of the Ruam Jai 2 community served on this CAG and received training. Ruam Jai 2 is further along than Ruam Jai 1 in institutionalizing mechanisms for child protection. However, these mechanisms are fragile and are not effective in practice. Thus, there is a need to continue support and strengthening of the CAG until it is self-sustaining and effective, with plans and budget for child protection. Further, the CAG should have links with the relevant government agencies to strengthen local action.

Government agencies lack linkages in the area of child protection

This research found that the linkages among relevant government agencies for child protections are limited and weak. This is because there is no system for child protection at the Tambon or even the district level. The MSDHS has tried to initiate coordination efforts in some locations, but there has not been much interest in reciprocating. This creates a gap between the community mechanisms and the district, and between the district and province. For example, in Ruam Jai 1, the local THPH has never opened a file with the history of child victims of sex abuse because these cases are never reported to the police or prosecuted. Thus, the THPH treats the case as non-existent, and the children’s shelter, provincial SDHS and police have no knowledge of these cases. In addition, often the government authorities ask local NGOs to pursue the matter at the community level. Both Ruam Jai villages said they can’t recall seeing government staff come to the community on child protection issues, except for Plan (Thailand) staff.

Law and Enforcement

The Thai government has established a structure through the various levels of committees, and the relevant laws have been updated or strengthened to more effectively address the situation. The government has issued announcements of urgent matters to inform and mobilize the relevant agencies. There has been the announcement of human trafficking as a national priority agenda. There are bi-lateral MOU to promote cross-border collaboration on the issue (e.g., the 1999 MOU on Trafficking of Women and Children) which are amended and expanded periodically. Chiang Mai implements interventions in accordance with the 2007 17-province accord and guidelines for the prevention, suppression and response to the problem of human trafficking (Sub-committee for Coordination Response to Trafficking of Children and Women, 2007). Nevertheless, human trafficking continues to be a problem in Thailand, even though there have been reductions in the documented number of Thai child victims.

Thailand has a large number of laws which could be more effectively applied to combat human trafficking in accordance with the criminal code and procedure, in addition to the offenses under the Anti-Human Trafficking Act (2008). There are at least 17 other laws which could be used to address the problem, including the Child Protection Act (2003) (Task Force on the Operations Handbook for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking, 2012). However, the relevant staff lack knowledge or diligence in enforcing these laws. What is more, the parents and child victims are not aware of their rights to protection and prosecution of perpetrators of abuse. Even when criminal complaints are filed, the result is not always optimal.

In any case, a legalistic approach may not be able to fully address the problem or, indeed, could exacerbate the problem, for example, in cases of parental abuse of their child, since that could cause divisions within the community and larger society by further eroding the institution of the family. If parents are arrested and imprisoned for child abuse, there may not be an appropriate caregiver for the abused children. Thus, instead of taking a criminalized approach, first there needs to be a social welfare strategy to solve the problem, with the goal being to maximize the benefit for the vulnerable child. That said, the research team strongly wishes to see more effective law enforcement in the most egregious cases.

Legal prevention and evolving models of service

The advancement of technology and unlimited communication potential (e.g., via the Internet and smart phones) are also contributing to new channels for sex predators. Commercial sex transactions can take place in the absence of any establishment and occur wherever it is convenient to do so. This makes it more difficult to monitor the practice and apprehend perpetrators of sex abuse or rape. During national campaigns to suppress criminal sex offenses, law enforcement has traditionally focused on entertainment establishments, brothels, pimps or madams instead of the buyer of sex. Indeed, the sellers of sex may not want to implicate the buyers since they are a source of valued income:

“It’s a dilemma. We don’t know where or how to apprehend the buyers of sex with children. These days, the sex predators are using the Internet or Line phone applications to troll for victims. There are probably no remaining entertainment establishments which have underage persons selling sex these days. Also, many of the youth insist they are selling sex voluntarily and are not a victim. Thus, they do not reveal any details of their customers.”

Absence of prevention through social activism

The Child Protection Act (2003) and the Anti-Human Trafficking Law (2009) are the key legal measures to combat sexual exploitation of children. A review of these laws, along with policies, strategies and measures to prevention and suppress human trafficking during 2011-16, shows that what these laws and measures lack is a focus on active social prevention to eradicate the root causes of the problem. Certainly, poverty is one driver of youth into selling

sex. The lack of adequate life skills building is another. There should be more attention to gender issues. Instead the national strategy addresses the consequences of the problem, amelioration and social welfare of victims. Staff at the provincial level acknowledge the deeper causes of the problem but lack resources and personnel to conduct more social activism to address those causes. They also have to implement programs that are consistent with the national plans and strategies:

“If we don’t address the problem at the root cause, we will never see the end of it in our lifetime.” (Female government civil servant)

Access to support budget

Ministries prepare a draft budget for approval by the Bureau of the Budget so that they can be coordinated and reduce duplication. The MSDHS, Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Tourism, Royal Thai Police, and the National Prosecutor’s Office have budgets to implement the following: (1) Policy and policy advocacy; (2) Protection and care of trafficking victims; (3) Prevention; (4) Prosecution; and (5) Domestic and international partnerships. The prevention component receives the largest proportion of the budget. However, when examining the programs being funded, it is clear that the focus is on legal prevention measures and training for government staff. There is very little budget allocated for working with the family, community and local organizations to address the problem at the source.

Under decentralization, it is expected that local administrative organizations (LAO) and NGOs will mobilize budget for local programs through the routine national budgeting process or by tapping into the central fund for anti-trafficking, through the MSDHS. Agencies which have requested support from the anti-trafficking fund said the process is difficult, complex and paperwork-heavy. Provinces receive allocations from the central Child Protection Fund, but the process of requesting and spending grants is difficult due to the many rules and regulations involved.

Changes caused by the restructuring of the MSDHS

The limitation of the MSDHS revised structure (which is still under development) is the limited number of staff, and lack of staff capacity to implement a wide range of responsibilities. Staff are still stuck in the traditional ways of implementing programs and are not adapting to the changing socio-cultural landscape. This results in a rigidity and lack of flexibility in integrating implementation among agencies and partners for more efficient outcomes. Thus, to improve performance, there needs to be a modernization of the approach of the provincial SDHS.

Obstacles to integration and inter-agency collaboration

The MSDHS does not have a branch office at the district or Tambon (sub-district) level. Thus, programs need to rely on the network of government agencies to fill in gaps at the periphery. Often, implementation falls short of the MSDHS goals and objectives. To address this, the MSDHS is building a cadre of SDHS volunteers to facilitate activities at the community level. However, coverage is limited and volunteer capacity is weak. If there is a case of a violation of the child in the community, mechanisms at the district or Tambon level must be activated to implement child protection. In the absence of an SDHS office at these levels, some districts have set up task forces. However, many of these task forces are inactive, meaning that victims of violations are not referred to the needed services.

Participation of the child

Thailand has had Provincial Youth Councils (PYC) since 2006 which are a focal point of the network of youth groups. The PYC members identify problems facing youth and brainstorm solutions. The research team found that the PYC did not have an opportunity to actively participate in government programs for children, and few people knew about the PYC. The PYC is an outgrowth of the 2007 National Youth Development Act, and the structure is top-

down management from the central level. At best, the PYC activity extends as far as the district, but does not reach the Tambon or village. Thus, the PYC have no structure to tap into the needs of ethnic minority children in the periphery.

Evaluation of achievements

So far, there has been no systematic evaluation of the success of prevention and suppression of sexual exploitation of children:

“There has not been any assessment of progress; so it is hard to draw concrete conclusions about achievement of national policy and programs. The evaluation should focus on children who have left the home community, and what their experience has been. If we can implement a safe migration program, then the outcomes should be OK. However, if 90 out of 100 youth who leave home are worse off, then that indicates that prevention failed. Then the shortcomings need to be identified.”

Public and Private Cooperation

Following the establishment of the national CMP committee, multi-disciplinary teams were formed, comprised of professionals from the public and private sector dedicated to assisting and protecting child victims. Collaboration improved over time, and this improved victim screening and coordination of network services. However, at first, the extent of collaboration between government and NGOs was not always optimal, and mostly consisted of training and capacity building of relevant staff. Over time, this collaboration has steadily improved.

“I have worked in anti-human trafficking for over a decade. At first, the CMP had no strategy or tools for implementation. People didn’t understand who the multi-disciplinary team was or what their role was. But now it is much better and there are a lot agencies involved to help implementation.”

“At first, staff didn’t know how to properly screen victims. However, later on, staff started using the same screening forms, and this helped to standardize outcomes. The agencies could seek advice from focal points in their respective agencies, and confer by phone. We have come a long way.”

However, the multi-disciplinary team function was disrupted by the periodic transfer and turnover of team members. Each time this happened, the team had to orient new members from scratch. There also had to be a period of building trust between the new staff and the case victims. There used to be a directory of the network members, but this has gone out of print and needs up-dating. The administrative section has a directory to guide the forwarding of documentation. Some members of the multi-disciplinary teams have created on-line groups through the Line application to remain in contact as needed.

3. Discussion

Factors and causes of the sexual exploitation of vulnerable children in the three study areas

A. Policy, plans and implementation

1. Policy and implementation of social outreach prevention in the community:

The government and related agencies are intensifying the prevention and suppression of human trafficking in the wake of the downgrade of Thailand from Tier 2 to Tier 3 watch list. Tier 3 is the lowest level and there are 23 countries in that group. Four years ago, when Thailand was classified as Tier 2, the focus was on exploitation of deep-sea fishing boat crew as the principle victim of human trafficking. Also, regarding the protection of children, the

focus was more on a criminal approach to suppression rather than pursuing social prevention (outreach) solutions. Accordingly, Thailand was approaching the problem from the effects side, instead of addressing the root causes. This can be seen as an endless process of ‘chasing the tail’ without any promise of a sustainable solution: *“It’s like scratching oneself to create an itch. Outreach means going to where the problem begins; not waiting for the victims to come to us.”*

2. Corruption and law enforcement: This is a persistent obstacle to implementation and hard to eradicate. Many of the key informants in this study felt that corruption was thwarting prevention and suppression of child sex exploitation, in that the prevailing laws were not being enforced. Officials who are known to be involved in sex rights violations or trafficking of children are not arrested or prosecuted.
3. The relevant agencies do not have concrete plans or implementation, e.g., the Ministry of Tourism and Sports;
4. The policy for suppression of drugs and local implementation is weak. The relevant community organizations are not motivated to address the problem since they don’t have confidence that they or their family will be safe if they oppose the drug dealers;
5. The MSDHS does not have a mechanism for advocacy at the district or community level. In Chiang Mai there is limited coverage and budget for the SDHS volunteers;
6. The government only provides limited budget support and not on a continuous basis, and coverage is incomplete.

B. Factors and causes related to the family customs and communities:

1. Families are poor. The farmers are dependent on rain water for their crops. There is increasing drought and declining crop yield and farm income. Thus, some children are pressured to seek work outside the home;
2. Families are not warm or loving. There is household strife, and this leads to children leaving home for the street;
3. The Kinwor custom and Jareu Dance;
4. There are gender-based differentials in child rearing. Girls are expected to be responsible to the family more than boys. Discipline is not equal for girls and boys;
5. There is abuse in child raising, when children are pressured to drop out of school to help earn money for the family. This constitutes a lack of proper parenting. The government specifies nine years of compulsory education for all children in Thailand. Children who have to drop out before the 9th grade to work could suffer physical and emotional injury. This violates Article 4 of the Child Protection Act (2003) and is a criminal offense. However, few parents are prosecuted for this crime. A better approach is to educate parents about the need to respect this provision of law and the reason for it. This would address the root cause of the problem, and keep families together;
6. The customary law practiced by the Lahu communities;
7. Families and communities practice denial when not admitting that their child has gone to work in commercial sex. This matter is not discussed openly even though everyone knows it to be true. In fact, some are starting to view commercial sex as an acceptable occupation, and an acceptable way to improve the household income. They may feel that adolescents who chose this

occupation are making a temporary sacrifice for the family and will return home after debts are paid off, and live a normal life in the village;

8. There is lack of knowledge or understanding about communication as a life skill, and how to avoid danger from new forms of information technology, the need to protect children, RH and RH rights, children's rights, human trafficking and methods of deception;
9. There is increased spread in the use of addictive drugs by parents, and this creates a financial burden on the household, pressuring children to seek work outside the home, or causing the family to move often to seek labor;
10. The spread of materialistic values of the current generation is causing more communities and families to become excessively capitalistic. This is causing traditional ethnic values and beliefs to erode and cause them to value material goods and compete with neighbors. When they see others with large houses, vehicles, fine clothes, or international travel they become envious, and sacrifice their traditional values to compete. Even the better-off are not satisfied and compete for more resources even though they have more than enough;
11. There is no community-based surveillance system to protect against sexual exploitation of children.

C. Child Factors

1. Dropping out of school out of a lack of confidence in the value of the education, lack of motivation for learning;
2. Sense of obligation to assist the family pressures youth to seek work to help support the family: *"I study then I work. It's not a burden. It's my responsibility to help my parents."* *"I don't think it is a burden (to work) because my family is poor."*
3. Lack of citizenship; documentation;
4. Materialism and desire for more wealth to raise economic level: *"Those kids don't want to be waiters/waitresses. They just want to have money, be better off, and have more things."*
5. Ignorance about RH and RH rights, marriage, having a child or not, family planning, STI, HIV;
6. Earlier marriage and childbearing. When youth marry during adolescence they relinquish some right to protections. Even if the youth was deceived into marriage, the village committee may decide to merely fine the perpetrator and force a marriage. The Kinwor custom or early marriage means that the youth is no longer considered a child, and loses some protections such as the right to an education, RH rights, right to good health, and right not to have to carry a pregnancy at too young an age;
7. Early divorce. Often, after the first child is born, the marriage dissolves. Usually, the infant is left under the care of its mother. These single mothers are young and usually only have primary education or dropped out. Thus, they are pushed further into poverty and are more vulnerable to being lured into the commercial sex trade;
8. Use of smart phones, the Line application, and Facebook without concern about the danger;
9. Youth lack life skills, for example, about the dangers within and outside the community, about the various types of tricks and deceit, or about the safe routes to travel from and back to the community because they have lived isolated lives in the home village;

10. Ignorance about the rights of the child. Lack of opportunity for participatory learning or developing critical thinking skills;
11. Motivation and invitations to seek work outside the country. The youth may see cases of other young women from the village who have gone to Malaysia and returned with wealth;
12. Participation in local customs, such as the Jakeu Dance, without proper preparation, can make youth more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

D. Factors and causes related to the relevant agencies

1. Lack of outreach; lack of knowledge of the problems in the community;
2. Lack of skill or experience in working with underprivileged communities which contributes to the high-risk, and vulnerability of its youth. The unfamiliar culture, customs, religion, language, beliefs, and values creates a communication gap between the staff of local agencies and target communities. The LAO staff do not have the relevant knowledge, understanding or outreach skills to establish links with the locals. Yet the LAO is the government agency in greatest proximity to the community, and should play a key role in child development. Some LAO staff have visited Ruam Jai Village but have not implemented any programs since they don't know where to start. They aren't familiar with community development, especially with ethnic minorities;
3. Lack of data in the following:
 - Information about child services agencies, in order to establish links with the support network for referral, prevention and protection of children;
 - Information about the vulnerable children in the village who are at risk of not completing compulsory education, or are at risk of sexual exploitation.
4. Lack of monitoring, inspection and evaluation of implementation. Thus, many children are denied access to their rights to needed services.

4. Challenges

1. Successful implementation

One of the obstacles to better implementation of programs for the prevention and protection of children is the lack of good evaluation of these programs. Proper evaluation would tell managers where programs are successful and where they are not, so improvements can be made in a timely way. Without empirical evidence, it is not possible to know what the situation is or how much progress has been made. There is a need for baseline data to compare with subsequent years' performance. There need to be clear indicators and targets for achievement, and these should be included in the operational plans. Too often, the plans are too short-term to reasonably expect results. Thus, evaluation of short-term programs can only produce data on outputs. What is needed is a determination of the effectiveness of the inputs and outputs to produce outcomes and impact. Part of the problem is lack of continuous budget to conduct longer-term monitoring and evaluation over multiple years in order to measure the full scope and depth of change, where it occurs.

2. Ad hoc, short-term interventions and continuous implementation over time

Even though there may be a provincial strategic plan or implementation plan for prevention and suppression of human trafficking, the government agencies are distracted by the need to respond to urgent, ad hoc directives. Thus, if the current government emergency concerns trafficking of deep-sea fishing boat crew, then resources and action are diverted away from other vulnerable populations, which then become lower priority.

3. Lack of innovative approaches to address the perpetrators

Currently, the forms and patterns of sexual exploitation are evolving rapidly. More often today, perpetrators are locating victims via the Internet, Line, or Facebook. This makes it more difficult for authorities to identify the perpetrators before they act.

4. Customary law

Customary law is still practiced in the Lahu villages in this study. This custom has been passed down through many generations and is deeply imbedded in the village culture. Unfortunately, some aspects of customary law may violate the rights of children in various aspects. What is more, if the community committee members, parents/guardians and family stand to receive material compensation from judgments of the committee, then there will be resistance to use formal Thai law to litigate cases. Thus, there is a conflict of interest in the search for justice.

5. Community lifestyles and law enforcement

In some of these traditional communities, marriage may be arranged for youth as young as 12 to 14 years of age. However, these customs and practices violate the sexual rights of children. But strict enforcement of formal Thai law would result in mass arrests in these ethnic minority communities. Also, would a criminal approach to the problem solve it or only make the situation worse? Promoting positive change in these traditional communities is a challenge: *“Girls who have just completed the 6th grade are already getting married at that young age. But how can you enforce the law and arrest people? It is a lifestyle and tradition. It is also seen as an acceptable practice to marry right after the 6th grade. It is difficult to help the community see the problem with this practice.”* (Female government official)

4. Good Practices

1. Using sports to prevent and rehabilitate youth drug addicts

In Ruam Jai 1 Village, male youth are often idle because they are not expected to help out the household as much as their female counterparts. Some Lahu boys turn to drugs to ease the boredom. One Christian male youth decided to motivate his peers (both drug users and non-users) to play more sports to prevent drug use and help addicts kick the habit. This became a popular and successful activity. It had the benefit of improving health of the youth and promote solidarity among them. NGOs working with street children are also promoting football as a deterrent to harmful or risky activity.

2. Scholarships to keep children in school

NGOs working with street children have established funds for education, uniforms, and even school lunch for all these children. Similarly, one female youth in Ruam Jai 1 said that she wanted to continue her education and dreamed of becoming a nurse. Though poor, her parents are supportive of her ambitions, and some of their Christian neighbors mobilized their church to create a scholarship. The young girl is currently continuing her education in the 1st year of high school and is on track to realize her dream.

3. Curbside teachers; Safe house for street children; Street children’s home

Curbside teachers conduct outreach and mentoring in lieu of the parents of street children. The children learn to trust and respect these outreach teachers out of the feeling of love, warmth, and understanding they give. The street children can see opportunity for a better future. The teachers coordinate with related agencies to try to meet the needs and aims of the street children. Reuniting them with their family, in a healthy home environment is the ultimate goal.

NGOs have created two types of safe houses for street children (Tongphul and Waewrung, 2015) as follows: (1) Open house. Street children may visit the house whenever they please and leave whenever they choose. Services include meals, a bed, sofas, treatment for injury or illness, clothes and shoes, continuing education and vocational training. (2) Street children's home. This facility is for children who want to leave life on the street permanently. The home is a transitional site toward a more stable life. There are separate facilities for males and females, but the home is open at all hours. The home helps the children see the value of not living on the street, and staff try to keep them off the street for as long as possible.

5. Conclusion

Despite Thailand's laws and policies to protect children from sexual exploitation, implementation has not yet been fully successful. Methods of exploiting children are evolving and vary by the context and lifestyle of the potential victims. Many youth, whether in ethnic communities in rural areas or on the streets in cities, drop out of school due to a variety of factors, and then become vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Youth living in low-income families may be more easily lured into outside exploitative situations out of economic need or family pressure. Either way, this is a form of child abuse. For street children, selling sex can be a means of survival. These adverse situations and violations of child rights in the community or on the streets present a big challenge for programs and services in the government and NGO sectors. There is an urgent need for social prevention through outreach, but it is difficult to achieve the necessary coverage to have an impact. Agencies need to create and expand professional networks across many disciplines to implement holistic, comprehensive prevention and response. The need to integrate these interventions makes the challenge even more formidable. There needs to be continuous budget support for long-term solutions, along with addressing the immediate needs of vulnerable children.

6. Recommendations

In 2014, Plan (Thailand) launched maternal and child health programs in Ruam Jai 1 and 2 Villages. This has helped familiarize the community with program staff and begin the process of building trust. Going forward, there will need to be pilot projects to develop effective models of prevention and protection of children from sexual violations and exploitation, and other aspects of human trafficking, for example:

1. Ruam Jai 1 is an appropriate site for multi-sectoral and interagency partnership responses and collaboration, including the relevant provincial-level agencies such as the Chiang Mai SDHS, local NGOs, and the LAO since no one agency alone can successfully tackle the problem in a sustainable way. There needs to be a multidisciplinary approach and longer-term implementation (at least 5 to 10 years) with an emphasis on holistic strategies which are child-centered. At the same time, the family factors must not be ignored, such as poverty and parental drug abuse.
2. Staff who work in the community setting need to be well-prepared in terms of understanding the local language, culture, customs, and the essential tasks for the prevention and protection of children from sexual rights violations.
3. Community outreach should be intensified in Ruam Jai 1 and 2 Villages in the form of action research, including the following:
 - Community mapping and survey, and creating a registry of all male and female children, regardless of nationality or documentation status. The

registry should include sex, age, educational attainment, marital status, parental status, living conditions (with parents/guardian or other) and source of income;

- Before proceeding, the survey team must consult with relevant persons to identify the prevailing conditions and obstacles, and prepare a needs assessment to tap knowledge, attitudes, problems, and challenges in collaboration with male and female leaders;
 - The implementation program should include case conferences;
 - Youth should participate in the program for prevention and protections, and be allowed to propose projects or activities to support the objectives. Plan (Thailand) can consider providing financial support for these activities and serve as a mentor and source of technical assistance;
 - There should be opportunities for study tours for children and community leaders to help them learn from the experience of successful programs in the prevention and protection of children in other parts of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai;
 - There should be regular monitoring and evaluation of the program and summaries of progress.
4. There needs to be more building of life skills related to life planning, protecting oneself from sexual exploitation, identifying risk and deceptive practices which violate sex rights, adverse consequences from sexual violations, skill in safe use of modern information technology, sources of assistance, knowledge of rights, gender, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, benefit of a good education and employment, creating a family, and financial savings.
 5. There should be projects to promote healthy and productive use of spare time of youth such as music, arts and sports, to combat use of addictive drugs;
 6. There should be projects to develop a model of strengthening prevention and protection of indigenous child sexual exploitation, through multi-disciplinary networking in Chiang Mai. This should be a strategy for implementation by the LAO, teachers, community leaders, women peer leaders, village committees, the police, the SDHS office, children and family shelters, and NGOs;
 7. There should be empowerment of children to know their rights, RH rights and prevention and protection from trafficking so that they understand how to take care of themselves, and know how to use RH services when appropriate. They should learn about the potential adverse consequences of having a child at a young age. They need to know about contraception and life planning; Parents/guardians and the neighbors should be involved in brainstorming ways to prevent problems, empower the community, and help children and young women to recognize threats of sexual exploitation and deception;
 8. The custom of the Jakeu Dance should be restricted only to community members or modified into an attraction for tourist and outsider appreciation and not sexual exploitation. In addition, there should be a minimum age restriction for participation in the Dance;
 9. There needs to be a community surveillance system to be alert for dangers of human trafficking and sexual exploitation of children. There should financial support from the Children's Fund and involvement of the LAO to help build capacity of villagers to work with multi-disciplinary teams with outside resource persons. A handbook and indicators will help the community identify early warning signs of sexual exploitation and/or trafficking. Women and girls should be involved in implementation, and be

- strengthened and empowered. There should be study tours to communities which had similar challenges and learn lessons that can be applied at home;
10. **Mechanisms to protect children:** Creating a network for child protection or a child protection center in the community to assist victims. There needs to be improvement in the Lahu village committee for the protection of children. There should be linkages between the three traditional leaders in the Lahu administrative structure (the Tobo religious leader, the blacksmith, and the Adaw (village leader). These traditional leaders still have responsibility for looking after the local villagers and administering customary law to address problems. Building knowledge and concern for child protections, with community members playing a role and participating in advocating for implementation of the Child Protection Act, in collaboration with the police, Tambon Health Promotion Hospital (THPH), community leaders and the executive of the TAO. This collaboration is more effective than simply relying on MSDHS staff to do the work themselves
 11. There should be more services as part of the outreach for prevention and protection of children in collaboration with multi-disciplinary teams. These services should be delivered as part of a collaborative network. There should be teams of male and female volunteers in the community to identify emergency cases and refer these to the appropriate personnel or hotlines. There should be criminal complaints filed when a violation or abuse has occurred, and prompt action by authorities to apprehend the perpetrator. The SDHS or LAO should provide transportation for child victims and family members to be taken to the hospital and police station. All of these actions need to use a child-centered approach;
 12. There should be a handbook for prevention and protection of children from trafficking, including deception and sexual violations. Content should be presented in pictures or graphics as much as possible, and avoid using too much text or technical language. The guidance needs to provide viable options to avoid risk, and real-life consequences of bad decisions. Parents need to understand the benefits of taking a child victim for a medical exam as soon as possible after a sexual violation, and the importance of reporting the crime to the police. The parents should know the steps in the process, how to prepare in advance, and what the child will experience;
 13. Families need alternative occupations. They need to find ways to apply their skills in ways that are consistent with local customs and the context. For example, there should be promotion of weaving, along with development of markets for the woven products. There should be occupational strengthening for men, building on their skills in climbing trees, for use in building roofs which is a skill needed by construction projects in surrounding areas. There should be linkages with related projects such as the Royal Project Foundation to build and develop assistance programs for villagers to apply new technology in agriculture. Villagers need to learn how to revitalize degraded land and practice more organic farming methods;
 14. The LAO have a role to coordinate with the Chiang Mai Committee for the Protection of Children, the provincial SDHS, and other related agencies to provide assistance to needy children and their families. This includes creation of a fund for child protection, assisting children and families in difficult circumstances, and assigning personnel to work in Ruam Jai 1 and 2 villages. There should funds to support children who finish school to stay in the home community, and help them tap into the community resources and social support;
 15. There should be scholarships for students who want to continue their education beyond the compulsory grades. Agencies should coordinate to support educational scholarships for children and arrange for jobs back in the home community. There

should be involvement of the provincial health office to train youth for a position in the local THPH. The Education Service Area Office can implement similar apprentice programs for village youth;

16. There should be cadres of volunteers through a volunteerism development program drawing on various groups in the community. This will help build knowledge and awareness of ethnic minorities and build skills in communicating with others and outsiders. This can lead to more skills building for community youth, establish peer-to-peer tutoring programs, pre-school preparation, preparation for high school and even college. There should be a special focus on ensuring and expanding educational opportunities for young girls. Girls and the community need to see the advantage of a higher education, and delaying marriage;
17. There should be study tours for parents and children to see best-practice model projects and communities to inspire them to improve and contribute to the public good. There should be recognition of exemplary residents in the community to be role models;
18. There should be a project to preserve positive aspects of traditional culture and customs, as long as the rights of children are protected. Participation in the local festivals and traditions should be based on beneficial aspects of spiritual beliefs and healthy community solidarity;
19. To address the problem of drug abuse, there has to be a team approach which is separate from the general community development activity. This should be the role of agencies linked with the Narcotics Suppression authorities and the military;
20. Aspects of the law need to be modified to address two different groups of children. If the victim is under 15 years, then a report of a violation should stay in force for a period of ten years, due to the need for time of adjustment and coping by the victim. However, if the victim is age 15 to 18 years, then the report of a violation should stay in force for only three months since the child is probably old enough to be able to cooperate with the legal case
21. During the workshop, community leaders from the study villages requested support from the relevant agencies. Their request is similar to the above-mentioned recommendations. The following are key areas for outside assistance: 1) Improve education of youth in the community and assist low-income families, so that their children can at least finish compulsory education. There should be a scholarship fund to support the education of low-income children. (2) Provide protections for children. The use of customary law to deal with these cases needs to end. In the past, access to the district was difficult, so use of the local customary law was a makeshift solution. There needs to be a transition period in which the customary law and Thai law are both applied. There must be sensitivity and fairness for the child victim. In the past, the villagers did not realize that applying customary law was a violation of the child's rights. The relevant agencies need to visit the community to provide education about Thai law so that the community leaders can transition from customary law to Thai law. (3) Outside officials should convene meetings in the community to educate the villages and conduct training for children and youth to understand how to protect themselves, acquire the necessary life skills, and marry at an appropriate age. (4) There has been assistance to villagers who need documentation of their Thai citizenship. (6) Drug abuse and addiction is a serious problem. The study village is located near the border with Myanmar, and drugs move easily across borders. (7) The villagers are mostly low-income farmers. It would be good if PLAN could support this area too. The villagers need help in revitalizing the land and adopt organic farming methods.

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