

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST SERVICE WOMEN IN  
VIENTIANE CAPITAL, LAO PDR**

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**ABSTRACT**

The objective of this study is to explore the forms of sexual violence against service women, to find out the social, cultural and situational contextual factors under which sexual violence takes place to service women, to elaborate how they cope with sexual violence, and to explore the social and health consequences of sexual violence committed against them.

A cross sectional study using, socio-cultural, feminist and social support approaches, complemented by qualitative research methodology was conducted from July to October, 2005 at the small beer shops 'Hunnoy' in Vientiane Capital of Laos. I did face to face interviews using a structured outline with 16 service women (including focus group discussion with 2 to 4 service women), in-depth-interview with 8 service women, and three additional key informants with pimps/mama-san.

Based on the findings, out of 16, 12 respondents experienced both physical and emotional violence and sexual violence in particular. They faced several forms of sexual violence, such as being forcing to do all sexual activities, oral and anal sex, taking drugs for sexual desire and active, heavy and long sex, using plastic and electric penis or sex toys, inserting fingers, sadism, sex using small balls with the penises penny, and oil (Champathong). They were raped by individuals and gangs. Sexual violence against service women was related to socio-cultural factor, a patriarchal system, gender inequality, which follows based on the personal resources, sexuality and sexual representation of service women that produced high stigmatization, and blaming of the victims by society.

It is recommended that information campaigns should be organized in order to raise awareness among risk groups on what can happen to them if they are offered a job away from their village. Those engaged in the sex industry should also be given information about the risk of alcohol and drug abuse, sexual diseases and HIV/AIDS infection and violence (physical, emotional and sexual) at the work place. It is necessary to build an integrated approach involving community network, legal system, policies, religious elements, NGOs and other community-based groups to implement equal gender empowerment. In order to prevent sexual violence and reduce its prevalence among service women, it is also essential that prevention efforts include education for these service women about their heightened risk of partner violence and strategies on how they might increase their safety. Efforts should include skills training such as problem solving, coping, and help-seeking. Service women need to be provided with alternative coping mechanisms and safety planning for risky situations.

**KEY WORDS: SEXUAL VIOLENCE/ PATRIARCHY/ SERVICE WOMEN**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| AIDS:    | Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome  |
| CEDAW:   | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination<br>Against Women |
| FAO:     | Food Agency Organization  |
| FHI:     | Family Health International   |
| GRID:    | Gender Resource Information and Development Centre                            |
| HIV:     | Human Immunodeficiency Virus  |
| HSSIP:   | Health Social Science International Program                                   |
| LWU:     | Lao Women's Union   |
| Lao PDR: | Lao People Democratic Republic  |
| NCAW:    | National Commission for the Advancement of Women                              |
| NGO:     | Non-Government Organization   |
| STD:     | Sexually Transmitted Diseases   |
| STI:     | Sexually Transmitted Inflection   |
| UNDP:    | United Nation Development Program   |
| UNICEF:  | The United Nations Children's Fund  |
| UN:      | United Nation   |
| VAW:     | Violence Against Women  |
| WHO:     | World Health Organization   |
| WCO:     | Women's Consulting Office   |

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background and Significance of the Study

Sexual violence is a profound social and public health problem in all countries. Women who experience sexual violence not only suffer severe physical injuries but also subsequently develop mental health problems. Victims often experience anxiety, guilt, nervousness, phobias, substance abuse, sleep disturbances, depression, alienation, and sexual dysfunction. They often distrust others and replay the assault in their minds, and are at increased risk of revitalization (DeLahunta, 1997). Women with a history of sexual assault are more likely to attempt or commit suicide (Felitti et al. 1998; Davidson et al. 1996; Luster and Small 1997; McCauley et al. 1997; Romans et al. 1995; Wiederman, Sansone, and Sansone 1998). Victims of sexual violence may have high risk of many chronic physical symptoms and illnesses such as chronic pelvic pain, premenstrual syndrome, gastrointestinal disorders, and a variety of chronic pain disorders. These also include headache, back pain, and facial pain (Koss and Heslet 1992). Moreover, studies have found that high levels of violence and rape might lead to a high level of unprotected sex and thereby increase the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and STD (Wingood et al. 2000).

The World Health Organization (1997) noted that at least one in five women experienced sexual abuse in their lives. Mooney's (1993, 1994) study about domestic violence in North London, found 23% of the respondents reported sexual abuse by a partner. According to the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men have experienced an attempted or completed rape, defined as forced vaginal, oral, or anal penetration, in their lifetime (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). Such estimates should be treated with caution, as they may not take full account of rape, sexual harassment, coercive sex and pressured sex, as well as emotional, psychological and other abuses. Many researchers and practitioners in this field

believe that existing national statistics underestimate the number of victims of sexual violence. They do not take into account the potential for significant underreporting of this crime due to its sensitive nature.

Sexual violence occurs when the victim does not consent to the sexual activity, or when the victim is unable to consent (due to age, illness or mental capacity) or refuse (due to physical violence or threats). Sexual violence includes physically forced penetration, non-penetrative abusive sexual contact (intentional touching), as well as non-contact sexual abuse (exposure to pornography). It also includes completed or attempted penetration of the genital opening or anus by the penis, a hand, a finger, or any other object, or penetration of the mouth by the penis or other object. Perpetrators of sexual violence are not only strangers but also someone known to the victim including partners, spouses or members in the family. However, sexual violence and rape including acquaintance rape is often viewed as not a legitimate crime either by its victims or by society. Women experiencing sexual violence are reluctant to report to authorities because of fear of public humiliation and insensitive judicial procedure. Moreover, victims may fear for their life since the perpetrators are often someone close to them with the ability to harm them. Thus, the phenomenon remains deeply hidden in many countries (Koss, Gidycz and Wisniewski 1987; Estrich 1987; Koss 1992; Richards 1995; Randall and Haskell 1995; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000; Mahoney and Williams 1998).

International and national organizations are concerned and interested with the issue of violence against women including sexual violence. The United Nations General Assembly (1993) adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (VAW), which constituted the first international human rights instrument to deal exclusively with violence against women. The Declaration on the Elimination of VAW stated the obligations of government and NGOs in protecting the human rights of women and girls. The 49th World Health Assembly in 1996 recognized violence as a public health priority and endorsed the recommendations of prior international conferences to tackle the problem of violence against women and girls, and to address its health consequences. The most extensive international law

dealing with the rights of women provided by the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1997), recommended that states provide support services for all survivors of gender-based violence. These support services certainly have to offer protection to all people against sexual violence, forced prostitution, sexual abuse and rape.

In Lao PDR, the Lao National Assembly passed a law on the protection of the rights and interests of women and children. The Lao Women's Union (LWU) has responsibility for responding to women's development needs and promoting the status and role of women. The National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW) is assisting the government to formulate women's national policy guidelines and strategic action plans to promote women's advancement and gender equality. The LWU has set up a Women's Consulting Office (WCO) in 2002, which has provided consultation services to 122 women involving their legal, health, and psychological situation as the result of the violence against them.

In 1998, the Gender Resource Information and Development (GRID) Centre through the LWU cooperated with the National Statistic Centre (NSC) to conduct a survey on the issues of domestic violence and rape for the first time in the Lao PDR. The result showed that 29 women out of the sample of 2399 households had been abused and battered and had experienced sexual violence in the previous 12 months. The Gender and Development Group (2004) noted that women experienced violence in the Lao PDR whereby up to 35% of women experienced emotional violence, up to 17% of women experienced physical violence, 1.6% of women experienced sexual violence from their husbands, and for 1.9% of women who experienced abuse it continued while they were pregnant.

Specifically, service women (sex workers) are the most high-risk group vulnerable to violence and sexual violence including HIV and STD infection. Research has documented the verbal, physical, and psychological abuse, and the lack of control experienced by women in brothels, strip clubs, and massage parlors (Maticka-Tyndale, Lewis, Clark, Zubick, & Young, 2000). According to the Council

for Prostitution Alternatives, located in Oregon, USA, it is estimated that women involved in prostitution are raped on an average of once a week (Hunter, 1994).

In Lao PDR, the findings from the country report (2003) study of 108 female sex workers showed infection rates of 43 percentage for Chlamydia, 26 percentage for gonorrhoea, and 15 percentage for mixed infection with a total infection rate of 54 percentage. This showed a higher rate than reported anywhere else in South-East Asia. Female sex workers often do not have the power to negotiate for safer sex, and are thus vulnerable to forced unprotected sex. This situation is even worse for female sex workers, who often give in to their male clients' demands. According to the National University of Lao's study (2005) 56.4 percentage of service women could not negotiate with customers to use a condom.

Sex workers are often perceived as second-class citizens and as a result, they do not have the power to exercise their rights to the same degree as others in the community (UNICEF, 2000). Society denies the existence of the sex industry and consequently does not place much value on the quality of the lives of sex workers. This disempowerment results in sex workers feeling that they have little choice about the decisions affecting their lives. Moreover, such lack of social power and discrimination heightens the level of risk for service women subjected to violence including sexual violence.

Despite the fact that there are a few studies on VAW, there are no studies on sexual violence against service women in Lao PDR. The phenomenon of sexual violence against service women is not recorded and made public. Specifically, this issue is not widely recognized among law enforcement agencies, police officers, and magistrates as well as health providers.

The purpose of this study is to explore the form of sexual violence and to describe significant contributory factors to sexual violence against service women. In addition, the study elaborates how they cope with the sexual violence and explores the

social and health consequences of sexual violence among service women in Vientiane the capital of Lao PDR.

The findings of this study will provide useful data for developing interventions in order to eliminate violence against service women. The implications of the study will be expected to address sexual violence against service women concerns through institutionalized mechanisms that provide proper support and a preventive program to service women, specifically in relation to sexual violence.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

- What are the forms of sexual violence against service women?
- What is the social, cultural and situational context in which sexual violence takes place among service women in the Lao PDR?
- What are the social and health consequences of sexual violence to service women?
- How do service women come up with strategies to prevent or stop sexual violence?

## **1.3 Objectives of Study**

- To explore the forms of sexual violence against service women in Vientiane Capital;
- To find out the social, cultural and situational contextual factors under which sexual violence takes place to service women in Vientiane Capital;
- To explore the social and health consequences of sexual violence to service women; and
- To elaborate how they cope with the sexual violence they experience

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL CONCEPT

#### 2.1 Definition and Scope

##### 2.1.1 Violence Against Women

The definition of violence against women is inconsistent and interchangeable. The commonly used terms are likely to have different meanings in different regions and are derived from diverse disciplines. There are several terms referring to violence against women such as gender-based violence, violence by a male partner, battered women, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. However, there is increasing international consensus that violence against women should be considered as “gender-based violence,” as it largely stems from women’s subordinate status in society with regard to men. Referring to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women UN Commission (2003), violence against women means “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”. According to this definition, violence against women includes spousal battery, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, rape and marital rape, female genital mutilation/cutting and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, sexual violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in school and elsewhere, trafficking in women, and forced prostitution. Such definitions reflect a narrow perspective as individual acts of violence, force or coercion that gravely jeopardizes the life, body, psychological integrity or freedom of women, is in service of perpetuating male power and control.

A broader definition moves beyond individual acts of violence to include form of institutionalized sexism that severely compromise the health and well-being of

women. This wider framework includes discrimination against women in food and medical care, female feticide, lack of access to safe contraception and abortion, and laws and social policy that perpetuate female subordination. According to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (UN 1993), the definition of violence against women was expansively defined as a form of social discrimination by using the term “discrimination against women”. Women need the right of freedom in terms of political, economic, social, cultural, civil and any other field. In other words, “violence against women is a clear violation of women’s inherent human rights, including the rights to life, liberty and security of person, equality, equal protection under the law, and freedom from all forms of discrimination”. Some specific groups of women, such as those belonging to minority and indigenous groups, refugees, migrants; those in poverty living in rural or remote communities; those in institutions or in detention, with disabilities, and those in situations of armed conflict and foreign occupation; and the elderly, displaced, repatriated and sex workers are particularly vulnerable to violence. Subsequently, acts of violence against women also include violation of their human rights in situations of armed conflict, in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy; forced sterilization, abortion, coercive/forced use of contraceptives, female infanticide and prenatal sex selection.

Martin and Carson (1996) noted that based on the article 1 of Declaration of The Elimination of Violence Against Women, the term of “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in or is related to physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women. It includes threats of acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. In article 2, violence against women needs to be understood over all the issues of women, which follows as below:

- (a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family. This includes battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other

traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.

- (b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community. This includes rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institution and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- (c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs.

In conclusion, the *definition of violence against women* is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.

### **2.1.2 Sexual Violence Against Service Women**

Sexual violence is a form of violence against women and often used interchangeably with the terms of sexual aggression, sexual assault, sexual coercion and rape. Sexual violence encompasses a broad range of violence that targets women's sexuality, and would include not only rape and sexual assault, but also sexual exploitation and sexual harassment. For example, the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women has defined sexual violence as "all forms of sexual threat, assault, interference and exploitation." The First World Report on Health and Violence defines sexual violence as "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work." World Health Organization, First World Report on Violence and Health 149 (2002). A

recent Human Rights Watch report defines sexual violence as "any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality." However, the distinction between two types of sexual violence—sexual harassment and sexual assault—may be difficult to define. Some behaviors could constitute both sexual harassment and sexual assault, while others will not. To the extent that sexually harassing behavior involves nonconsensual sexual contact, it also falls within the definition of sexual assault. ([http://www.stopvaw.org/Sexual Assault as a Form of Sexual Violence.html](http://www.stopvaw.org/Sexual%20Assault%20as%20a%20Form%20of%20Sexual%20Violence.html))

Generally, sexual violence can define as any kinds of sexual contact or other sexual acts without women's consent. It includes touching, rubbing and kissing of sexual organs, slapping of bottom, forced sexual intercourse or other sexual acts without women's consent, sexual assault, and all forms of sexual coercion (Browne, 1993; WHO, 1997). The former Special Rapporteur defines sexual assault to include many forms of unwanted sexual contact, including "insertion of objects into genital openings, oral and anal coitus, attempted rape and the infliction of other sexually abusive acts," acts of molestation or fondling that do not result in penetration, and "the use or threat of force in order to have sexual acts performed by third persons." ([http://www.stopvaw.org/Types of Sexual Contact.html](http://www.stopvaw.org/Types%20of%20Sexual%20Contact.html))

It should be stated that sexual violence is defined based on the concept of "consent" instead of "force or coercion." Consent encompasses situations in which force or coercion may not have been present, but the victim is physically or mentally unable to consent. The victim may, for example, be unable to give consent to the sexual contact because of age, or the influence of drugs, alcohol or medication; perpetrators may also force sexual contact when the victim is asleep or unconscious.

Moreover, a consent-based definition of sexual violence avoids some of the ambiguities that may be associated with the term "force" or "coercion" because it emphasizes the victim's perspective. Behaviors that may not be viewed as coercive by the perpetrator may be highly coercive as experienced by the victim. For example, behaviors can be coercive because of the larger context in which they occur. A woman who has been battered or assaulted by her partner in the past "may choose to submit to

unwanted sex acts out of fear, hopelessness, exhaustion, the desire to minimize injury to herself or others, or simply the hope that doing so will end the whole episode." These women may not even themselves identify such experiences as sexual assault, "even when they are certain that the sex was unwanted, against their protests, and /or involved injury or pain." (Claire M. Renzetti et al. eds. 2001).

In any of the forms of sexual assault, minority and marginalized women are often the most vulnerable—and generally also those who face the greatest obstacles to gaining protection and necessary services. As the Special Rapporteur has explained, minority women may be seen "as sexually available and undeserving of protection a woman." Women may also be labeled unworthy of protection because of their poverty or low social status.

Sex workers, in particular, are at a particularly high risk of sexual violence, especially in countries in which sex work is illegal. Women engaged in sex work have little or no protection from the legal system. They may be reluctant to report assaults, either because sex work is illegal, or because they will not be believed.

Sexual violence against service women refers to the use of sexual acts that are unwanted by and/or harmful to service women. It may involve relations in three categories as violence from police or authorities, violence from customers, and violence and coercion from traffickers or pimps. According to the report of Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center in New York City (2005) 14% of sex workers experienced incidents of police violence, and victims of such violence felt they had no recourse, 16% of respondents have been involved in sexual situations with the police. This study also found that 46% of respondents have been forced by a client to do something she did not want to do such as having sex without condom, anal and oral sex etc. About 8% of respondents reported that they were trafficked into the country for prostitution and were raped by the traffickers. A study among 200 sex workers in Tamil Nadu, India about the violence they had experienced found that more than 95% had experienced violence especially when they first began working (Jayasree, 2004).

According to John Lowman (2000), the violence against street prostitutes perpetrated by clients can be classified into two main types: *situational and predatory*. “Situational” violence occurs when a dispute arises during the course of a transaction and the client resorts to violence to resolve it. The dispute might take the form of a disagreement about services performed, price paid, an alleged rip-off, and so forth. It is “situational” in the sense that it is not premeditated. Sexual assaults, assaults, and robberies may all arise from such disputes. While these offences are not premeditated, they are not entirely situational either. “Predatory” violence is premeditated. It may be financially motivated as a planned robbery and it may be misogynist, sexual and serial. The offender is not a client as such, because he sets out with a different agenda. He knows what he is going to do before he does it, and he knows where to find victims, for example, the unregulated and mostly unmonitored prostitution strolls of a city like Vancouver. The choice of a prostitute as a target is, at least partly, a matter of opportunity: because street prostitutes will get into a car with a stranger, they are targets. The term predatory sexual violence against prostitutes is “misogynist” because the maliciousness and viciousness of some of the sexual assaults and murders is “beyond belief.” Lowman described the behaviour of many of the men who assault prostitutes as “very physical... very intimate ... and designed to hurt”.

This study used the definition of sexual violence against service women as “*unwanted sex or had sex against their will*”. This definition uses a subjective definition from service women’s point of view. *Unwanted sex* means any form of sexual acts to which service women really do not want to provide sex, but they would be forced by using violence (such as slaps, hits and kicks etc) in order to make them provide sexual service; they are forced by pimp or madam to provide sex service for a particular client. They might also be raped by a gang. . *Sex against the will means* any form of sexual acts to which service women are forced to have sex by using materials (such as a small ball, oil, taking a drug to encourage them to have sex for a long time and more, plastic penis etc); to have oral and anal sex; to have sex without payment.

## 2.2 Prostitution Theory

**Prostitution** is the sale of sexual services for money. A person selling sexual services is a prostitute, a type of sex worker. In a more general sense of the word, anyone selling their services for a cause thought to be unworthy can be described as prostituting themselves. While prostitutes and their clients represent both sexes and all sexual orientations, the overwhelming majority of clients are male. Prostitution is rejected by most religions as being improper or sinful, and prostitutes are considered to be shameful or individuals of low standing in most societies; their customers are typically tolerated to a greater degree. Organizers of prostitution are typically known as pimps (usually male), madam-san (female, general prostitution today but traditionally related to brothel prostitution) (Wikipedia, 2001, 2006).

The term prostitution is sometimes used in the more general meaning of having sex in order to achieve a certain goal different from procreation or pleasure. This includes forms of religious prostitution in which sex is practiced in compliance with religious precepts. Prostitution in this broader sense is also used in espionage. Another generalization is using the term or an equivalent to mean any form of good earnings in an unscrupulous degrading manner, e.g. quote whore, media whore, and karma whore. The term pimp is also sometimes similarly used figuratively, as in poverty pimp. Among modern day youth, a pimp can mean both a manager of prostitutes or a guy that attracts female attention easily (Roger Ebert, 2001).

Prostitution is the “act or practice of engaging in sexual intercourse for money.” Medieval canon lawyer Johannes Teutonicus suggested that a woman who had sex with more than 23,000 men should be classified as a prostitute, although 40–60 would also do (Bullough, 1987).

Thanh-Dam Truong (1990) noted that patriarchal culture defines female sexuality in male term to serve male needs; no distinction can be made between prostitutes and other women. As such, prostitution cannot be accepted as a vocation but only as a form of violence against women’s dignity. By contrast, women under

male domination enhance the politic aspect of prostitution and related forms of sexual abuse, but minimize the social difference among women and among prostitutes.

Prostituted persons, according to the International Labor Organization (1998) study, numbered about 400,000 to 500,000 in Philippines. Most of them were adult women, but there were also male, transvestite and child prostitutes, both girls and boys. The number of child prostitutes then was estimated to be around 75,000. Child prostitutes often live perilously and are exploited by crime gangs, pimps and even drug pushers. The study claimed that 150,000 Filipino women were trafficked into prostitution in Japan. It is tragic that this was allowed to happen, even as the modern-day Japanese government has refused to officially pay reparations to the estimated 80,000 to 200,000 so-called "comfort women" who were kidnapped – and sexually exploited by Japanese soldiers – during World War II from Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, China and Malaysia.

The Philippines ranked fourth among nine nations with the most number of children trafficked for prostitution, according to a report by the Consortium Against Trafficking of Children and Women for Sexual Exploitation (Catch-Wise). The Catch-Wise report was presented this year during the international conference on sexual exploitations and it stated that the Philippines is not only the source of 60,000 to 100,000 children for prostitution, but is now also a transit and destination country for internationally trafficked persons. (Sol Jose Vanzi, 2005)

While many current studies highlight the tragic stories of individual prostitutes, especially of women and children deceived or coerced into the practice, the ILO surveys point out that many workers entered for pragmatic reasons and with a general sense of awareness of the choice they were making. About one-half of Malaysian prostitutes interviewed for the study said it was "friends who showed the way to earn money easily," a pattern that is replicated in the other study countries. Sex work is usually better paid than most of the options available to young, often uneducated women, in spite of the stigma and danger attached to the work. In all four of the countries studied, sex work provided significantly higher earnings than other forms of

unskilled labour. In many cases, sex work is often the only viable alternative for women in communities coping with poverty, unemployment, failed marriages and family obligations in the nearly complete absence of social welfare programmes. For single mothers with children, it is often a more flexible, remunerative and less time-consuming option than factory or service work. Surveys within sex establishments revealed that while a significant proportion of sex workers claimed they wanted to leave the occupation if they could, many expressed concern about the earnings they risked losing if they changed jobs. (ILO, 1998)

Sanitsuda Ekachai, a feminist journalist from Bangkok Post Newsletter which is one of the leading newspaper in Thailand interview Prof. Malee Preukponsawalee, a feminist academic and Jantawipa Apisuk, a female feminist activist on various perspectives on sex workers issues and they brought out four main legal propositions concerning prostitution. Firstly **Criminalization aspect** considering Sex workers is bad women, but they are necessary evil in the society to prevent good women from rape. Therefore, the policy should allow commercial sex under strict control with criminal punishment for sex workers in order to keep business discreet and to protect the clients. Secondly **Legalization** considers that since prostitution exist in the society and will not go away should be legalized and taxed. Hence, policy recognizes prostitution as profession, register as sex workers and regulate the sex business venue. Thirdly **Abolition considers** prostitution is part of human trafficking which must be eradicated. Therefore there is a need to crack down those involved in human trafficking while helping the victims quit the flesh trade. Fourthly **Decriminalization** consider, although the prostitution is part of human trafficking which must be eradicated. The sex workers should be allowed to continue to work independently if they so wish. Therefore, it should revoke all laws which criminalize or punish sex workers. Give them labour welfare benefits as other business employees. Allow consenting adults to sleep with customers without exploited by pimps, procurers or business operators. Support them to set up groups to protect their rights.

## **2.3 Theoretical Concept**

### **2.3.1 Feminist Perspective**

Feminist analysis of violence against women focuses concerns on the structure of relationships in a male-dominated (patriarchal) culture, on power, and on gender relations (Bogard, 1988). Feminist explanations of violence focus on the relationship between the cultural ideology of male dominance and structural forces. Yllo & Straus (1990) said that violence against women is one manifestation of a system of male dominance that has existed historically and across cultures. Violence becomes a method, which maintains social control and male power over women. In other words, violence against women is a result of the subordinate position women occupy in the social structure, and is a subject of sexual satisfaction for men.

Sexual violence is a result of long-held traditions of male dominance. Prostitution and pornography reinforce male dominance in subservient ways. In other words, sexual violence is the male response to social inequality between men and women, which legitimizes the violent appropriation of women's bodies for individual gratification. The objective of sexual violence is control and domination.

Dutto (1994b) argued that the structural patriarchy is the causes of violence, but the explanatory power of this perspective is limited. He also noted that there is no empirical evidence on the relationship between structural inequality and norms to support the violence against women.

Like almost all societies in the world, the Lao PDR is also a patriarchal society (male domination and female's subordination), revealed through expectations and norms for women and men that are inequitable. According to the Lao Women's Union (2005) report on the "*Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*", men must be strong, must lead the family, and must be the representative of the family in society; in addition, they are considered appropriate to be leaders in the society. Women must be gentle, self-effacing, good housewives, caretakers of the husband's children, and followers who stay in the

background. In other words, a wife must defer to her husband in all things, and most particularly in matters of social status. Moreover, as the result of unequal gender relations, this affects women's life in the following aspects such as multiple burdens of women in the family (women do double the work and work longer hours) and disadvantaged in education and training, which may lead them having low self-esteem, no self-confidence, low social status and vulnerability to gender based violence.

This study will use the radical feminism perspective as a theoretical basis of the study in order to explain why service women have experienced sexual violence. Below is a detailed explanation of the proposed theoretical basis of this study.

### **2.3.2 Radical Feminism Perspective**

Radical feminism is distinguished by its analysis of *gender inequality* in which men as a group dominate women and are the main beneficiaries of subordination of women. In other words, radical feminism emphasizes patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or, more specifically, social dominance of women by men. Radical feminism views patriarchy as dividing rights, privileges and power primarily by gender, and as a result oppressing women and privileging men.

This theory describes how women and men have different roles in the community. Women are living within masculine activities that are more meaningful and important compared to feminine activities (Stockard & Johson, 1992). In the most common society, the main roles of men are mainly productive labour outside the house that supports their families in terms of economics or family income generation. On the women, they tend to be reproductive labour in domestic fields such as doing household work, preparing food, taking care of children, servicing husband etc. That is why radical feminist insist, that the root of women's oppression is a patriarchal system, which puts male domination over female.

Sexual practice is seen to be socially constructed around male notions of desire, not women's. Further, sexuality is seen as a major site of male domination over

women, though which men impose their notion of femininity on women. Heterosexuality is socially institutionalized in contemporary society and organizes many other aspects of gender relations. Man's violence against women is considered as a part of a system of controlling women. Eventually, women tend to be in a subordinate position under men's domination; men have rights to control women in term of social organization of family life such as to control their sexuality, reproduction and their bodies (Cheal, 1991).

The unequal position in the society and family between men and women trends to cause men to do violence against women if men do not get satisfied, such as sexual violence, slapping or abuse in other ways to make women fear and remain under men's control. In other words, men are more likely to act abusively against women in order to control all aspects of women's lives.

Finally, radical feminist theory explains that domination of men over women in both the society and family is one plausible cause of several kinds of violence against women. The dichotomy between '*men's public sphere*' and '*women's domestic sphere*' tends to place women in a low and weak position. Therefore, the kinds of abusive conducts such as sexual harassment, rape, women battering and the like are the repercussions of the existing patriarchal system in which the whole world lives. This happens when men automatically use their power and authority to control women lives.

### **2.3.3 Radical Feminism Perspective Toward Service Women**

The radical feminist perspective notes that "female prostitution oppresses women, not because some women who participate in it *suffer in the eyes of society* but because it is in organized practice that testifies to and perpetuates socially hegemonic beliefs which oppress all women in many domains of their lives" (Robert M. Stuart, 1995).

According to the radical feminist view, men are socialized to have sexual desires and to feel entitled to have those desires met, whereas women are socialized to meet those desires and to internalize accepted definitions of femininity and sexual objectification. Radical feminism views prostitutes as a situation where men have reduced women to an image of being mere sexual objects. This allows men to unconscionably oppress and coerce women in order to satisfy their own fantasies through prostitution. Political and economic power seems unfairly divided. Men are in the position of dominance, demanding and getting what they want. Men are socialized to have sexual desires and to feel entitled to have those desires met, whereas women are socialized to meet those desires and to internalize accepted definitions of femininity and sexual objectification (Jody Freeman, 1996.)

Jody Freeman (1996) notes that radical feminism does not view prostitution as a victimless crime, but as a situation where men have reduced women to an image of being mere sexual objects. This allows men to unconscionably oppress and coerce women in order to satisfy their own fantasies through prostitution. Political and economic power seems unfairly divided in the world according to these feminists. Men are in the position of dominance, demanding and getting what they want.

Radical feminist (Belknap Harvard, 1981; Kathleen Barry, 1995) also emphasized that there are at least nine categories of description that prostituted women appear to fall into, which follow:

1. There are women who inadvertently fall into poverty and turn to prostitution but have the emotional fiber to withstand the hardships of the profession until they can find something else to do;
2. There are women born poor into families with a long history of poverty and a lack of education;
3. A woman may be abducted against her will for no reasons of defect in her character and be forced into prostitution;

4. A woman might voluntarily enter the profession because of defects in her moral character that allow her to fall into association with violent and exploitative social predators, who, like her, do not wish to follow the rules of any legal or moral system;
5. A woman may have been “distanced” and demoralized by a fiercely competitive childhood in which she was unable to compete successfully for sufficient attention from parents, teachers, or employers for her to find acceptance and develop direction. Many prostitutes of this category who have their rational faculties intact are able to resist the intimidations of pimps and avoid a considerable amount of abuse;
6. A low intelligence and physical and mental problems may lead a woman to find a viable way to be part of a productive society through prostitution. Some of these women might be so unpredictable or incorrigible that they would not make “good women” for pimps. They would be easy women to get close enough to for exploitation by a pimp trying to establish a relationship by way of feigned intimacy;
7. Some women perhaps find that they take to prostitution naturally like “fish take to water.” This category may include prostitutes whose mothers or relatives were prostitutes through several generations;
8. In the smallest category are attractive women who are very smart. These women recognize an opportunity to make an extraordinarily high income as prostitutes. They place themselves out of danger with wealthy, influential, and intelligent men who can afford a premium price for sexual service; and
9. Some people are irrepressible personalities who seek the challenge of the most dangerous of undertakings.

In conclusion, radical feminist perspective on sexual violence against service women is about *gender practice*, which relates to gender role and power relations between men and women as men use power and control to dominate over women, and then cause women to be powerless and standing in subordination to the position of men. Men oppress and coerce service women in order to satisfy their own fantasies because men are in the position of dominance, demanding and getting what they want such as sexual desires. The sexual violence must not be understood as a sexual act, but as an act of domination over service women in the context of power differentials between men and women.

#### **2.3.4 Concept of Sexuality**

Tarshi (2001) noted that sexuality encompasses personal and social meanings as well as sexual behavior and biology. A comprehensive view of sexuality includes social roles, personality, gender and sexual identity, biology, sexual behavior, relationships, thoughts and feelings. The expressions of sexuality are influenced by various factors including social, ethical, economic, spiritual, cultural, and moral concerns. Tarshi mentioned that there are several key elements of sexuality as following:

- All people are sexual, whether or not they engage in sexual acts or behaviour.
- People express their sexuality through both positive and negative attitudes and behaviours.
- Sexuality expressed positively, through consensual, mutually respectful and protected relationships, enhances well-being health, and the quality of life.
- Sexuality expressed negatively, through violence, exploitation, or abuse, diminishes people's dignity and self-worth, and may cause long-harm.

- Being sexual is not only about sexual acts and behaviour; it also includes thoughts, attitudes, and feelings.
- Sexual pleasure is expressed in a variety of ways that include emotional and biological responses.
- Society exerts strong controls on sexuality, especially women's sexuality, through social norms, values, and laws.
- The understanding of sexuality has considered only men's experiences and needs and has ignored, negated and devalued those of women.
- Many people are initiated into sexual activity in negative ways through experiences of abuse, coercion, or violence.

Feminism interprets sexuality in context of gender roles and power relations (Richardson, 1990; Chodorow, 1974). Sexual behavior is the production of society in gender relationship, which is established to members of society through family, school, peers and community. According to Dixon Mueller (1993), sexuality means the physical capacity for sexual arousal behavior and formation of sexual and gender identities. Sexuality is comprised of four elements including sexual partnerships, sexual acts, sexual meanings, and sexual drive and enjoyment.

The first element of sexuality is sexual partnerships, which are the main factors, which can explain sexual behaviors. It includes the number of partners, selection of partners, timing and duration of relationships, social identity of partners, condition of choice and coercion and the frequency of partner changing. The number and identities of partners are commonly incorporated models of sexual networking and disease transmission (Dyson, 1992).

Patterns of partner selection can change dramatically over the course of a lifetime, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood to old age. Conditions surrounding sexual initiation appear to be particularly important in shaping subsequent attitudes and behavior, including long-term reproductive and health outcomes. According to the research in a Caribbean country is showed that girls who have experienced physical or sexual abuse as children are more likely than others to have early first intercourse and more sexual partners as adolescents and young adults Handwerker (1991). The authors of the Caribbean study also contend that family violence, sexual abuse, and the level of sexual activity are linked from one generation to another and have a common origin in structural features that regulate gender relations.

Gender differences in the timing of initiation or cessation of sexual activity and in the identity, number, and choice of subsequent partners reveal a double standard in virtually every society. Reflecting both structural and ideological forces, power and resource imbalances are played out in ways that impinge deeply on girls' and women's abilities to choose whether, when, and with whom to have sexual relations or to engage in a particular sexual act (Orubuloye, Caldwell, and Caldwell, 1991).

The second element of sexuality is sexual acts, which are concerned with sexual relationships between couples. This dimension of sexual acts is made up of the following measures: nature of sexual acts, frequency of sexual acts and the condition of choice of specific sexual practices and coercion. Nature of sexual acts is related to an assumption that sex consists of voluntary heterosexual intercourse with vaginal penetration. According to Dixon Mueller, there are different styles that are rarely mentioned such as repeated encounters in quick succession, oral or anal, or non penetrative forms of sexual expression such as mutual or solitary masturbation, sex with children, use of pleasure enhancing devices or techniques. The frequency of sexual act expressions in which people engage is important to their sexual and reproductive health.

Another element of sexuality refers to sexual drive and enjoyment. This element includes women's and men knowledge of the body's sexual and reproductive capacities and the ability to obtain physical and emotional pleasure from fantasy, sexual encounter or self-stimulation. There is also differences between individuals, and between males and females because of the social construction of gender difference. In other words, sexual drive and enjoyment consists of the formation of sexual identities, socially conditioned sex drives, and perceptions of pleasure (Tan et al, 1997).

The last element is related to sexual meanings. People perceive sexual meanings due to cross-cultural perception that there are imposed ideals to which people must conform to, often at great cost to themselves and to others. Sexual meanings also relate to individual beliefs about the nature of body, what is considered in sexuality desirable rather than unpleasant plus what action and topics of sexuality are appropriate or inappropriate for men and women (Mueller, 1992). As Mueller suggested, being a "*real man*" is associated with virility and potency as well as with bravery, honor and responsibility. Mueller also emphasized that sexual behavior is the objective of gender power relations between male and female sexual partners. Dramatic shifts in the meaning and expression of sexuality among females and males can occur throughout a life cycle.

The study used the concept of sexuality in terms of sexual meaning and sexual behavior in order to understand their conceptual thinking of these elements. The element of sexual meaning refers to their perceptions toward masculinity and femininity as relates to sexuality and the meaning of will sex from the service worker's perspective. The element of the sexual act or behavior consists of the nature of the sexual act, frequency of sexual acts and the condition of choice. This will help to understand the pattern of sexual behavior and related factors in relation to the occurring of sexual violence against service women.

### **2.3.5 Social Representation**

The theory of social representation starts from the diversity of individuals, attitudes and phenomena, in all their strangeness and unpredictability. Its aim is to discover how individuals and groups can construct a stable, predictable world out of such diversity (Moscovici, 1984). This diversity becomes organized by social representations that carry with them constructed meanings of the past, and make these available for new applications.

Social representations are simultaneously re-presentations (of what already has come into being, and is recognizable on the basis of previous experience) and representations (of the expected—yet indeterminate—future experience). If viewed from this perspective, social representations are idea complexes that play the role of macro-level cultural constraints of human conduct in its PRESENT → FUTURE transition. These constraints lead to the generation of micro-level constraints that guide particular thought, feeling, and acting processes (Jaan Valsiner, 2003).

Social representations belong to the category of such pre-adaptational means—semiotic mediating devices. Their functions cover a wide range of human psychological phenomena—ranging from immediate, momentary and temporary “flashes” of meaning-in-context to memories encoded selectively in terms of meaning complexes (Bartlett, 1932).

According to the Southeast Asian Consortium on Gender, Sexuality and Health (2005), a glossary of terms in gender and sexuality notes that representation is a term used to refer to the way culture, including beliefs, norm, behavior, rituals, is described in the mass media as well as in scholarly journal articles. Note the word “representation” can be broken down to “re-presentation”, meaning different people use different perspectives to describe “reality”. Postmodernists like Jacques Derrida say that “reality” is relative, affected by a writer’s own personal beliefs and social background. This is particularly important in reviewing studies about sexuality. For example, sex workers might be presented as aggressive seductress, or as helpless victims.

“Social representation” is normally meant as a whole of the common sense theories that do express systems of values, convictions and behaviour rules, which have got both the roles of organizing the perception of the world and of serving as a shared code for social communication and for interpersonal exchanges. The social representation is then the output of the interaction between the person and the environment and with the other people, generating a shared system of meanings. (Palmonari 1991)

The significance of this concept can be imagined when we do refer to collective representations connected with social phenomena such as deviance, marginality, social exclusion and the following implications regarding the factors of stereotype and bias that are inside the complicate a universe of the social representation. We face a whole complex of information, cognition and ideological factors giving the common sense of reality; the same factors influence the transformation of the reality. The change in a circular sense between information of the outside world and the inside world (of cognition and perception) allows, then, a space for observation and action, in order to influence the change of social representations of community and to influence the same community in its attitude towards social phenomena that individuals consider as threatening and conflict factors, likely to disintegrate and to cause the loss of identity of the same community (Stefania Alunni Breccolenti, Stefania Cavalaglio, 2003)

Thanh-Dam Truong (1990) noted that for an historical property such as promiscuity or sexual violence to prostitution, it is more useful to start with the most basic element in prostitution, namely sexual service under exchange relations, and look how the nature of such service and the relations surrounding them are transformed. Thanh-Dam Truong also emphasised that prostitution must be understood as a set of social relations, which involves the provider of sexual services, the receivers or buyers and the regulator. The nature of the social relations of prostitution concerns the regulation and control of exchange of sexual services, the distribution of material gains, and the construction of prostitutes (as providers of sexual service) as subjects.

## **2.4 Sexual Violence Against Service Women: Empirical Studies**

Service women may be viewed as comprising work that can be socially useful and can provide job satisfaction, personal fulfillment, empowerment and self-actualization, where becoming service women can be a genuine life choice. However, it is recognized that alongside these potential benefits, there are downsides in terms of violence, stigmatization, poor pay and conditions of employment, and job insecurity (Gregor Gall, 2004).

Evidence shows that violence against service women takes many forms and comes from various quarters (S. Laosn, 1999). Police harass sex workers, sometimes forcing them to offer free services in exchange for not being arrested. Pimps and managers threaten and coerce the women to do things that they do not want to do. Clients force sex workers to perform sex acts other than those originally agreed to and may even take back the money they paid once the encounter is over. Community members verbally abuse sex workers whom they regard as a nuisance. Gangs force sex workers to sell drugs and rape them. Sex workers are further at risk from their partners who may physically, emotionally or economically abuse them.

Carmen Carrington and Claude Betts (2002) noted that partner abuse is a common occurrence of sexual violence among sex workers. One in eight sex workers mentioned having been forced to have sex against their will while exercising commercial sex work. In addition, they mentioned that experience of rape on the job was 40% among sex workers on the streets.

The research finding on drug use and physical and sexual abuse of street sex workers in New York City (2001) found that two out of three street sex workers have experienced sexual abuse by either an intimate partner or client. In addition, one out of eight sex workers reported sexual abuse by both intimate partners and clients during their lifetime. The prevalence of recent sexual abuse by clients was 20.8%, which was twice as high as by intimate partners. As for the results, these can suggest two possible explanations for this discrepancy as follows:

1. Sexual violence by clients may occur more frequently because the clients perceive that they are entitled to sexually exploit women who trade sex. Moreover, sex workers may tolerate sexual abuse by these men because they view it as 'part of the job'. This is especially true for those who are homeless or whose primary source of income is prostitution.
2. Explanation for the disparity in the reported prevalence of recent sexual abuse may be related to the women's tendency not to label, recognize, and define sexual coercion and rape in an intimate relationship as abuse and, consequently, such abuse is underreported. Furthermore, the report also showed that early trauma might make sex workers more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Sex workers who experienced childhood sexual abuse were more likely to report being sexually abused by clients. Because of early trauma, such women may habitually select abusive partners, and then use drugs to cope with the abuse. Sex workers who reported use of injectable drugs and cracks were more likely to report sexual violence by their clients than those who did not use these drugs (Nabila El-Bassel and Susan Witte, 2001).

Another type of violence against sex workers is by police officers, many sex workers report being sexually assaulted, harassed and raped by the police, and that the threat of criminal prosecution is used to coerce them into not reporting these acts of violence. The Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center (2005) found that 14% of respondents experienced incidents of police violence, and victims of such violence felt they had no recourse; and 16% of respondents had been involved in sexual situations with the police.

According to Maria Waldenez de Oliveira et al. (2001), Brazilian sex workers run daily risks of sexual violence, of being forced to have sex against their will or being left without payment after the sexual intercourse. On some occasions, they even run the risk of being murdered. They also mentioned that inside a power relationship, a

Brazilian female sex worker shares with other women the social reality of being subordinate to men. Some clients think they can do anything with sex workers because they pay, because they view that sexual intercourse with clients in a sex work setting is an obligation like a marital obligation as sexual intercourse between man and wife. Accordingly, in Brazilian society, sexual violence is socially accepted as a way for men to take what is rightfully theirs, in the marriage or in the sex work situation.

In addition, in the testimony of a woman who has suffered from sexual violence, the victims must prove she was brutally injured. The testimony of female sex workers is worth even less and they are not listened to. Thus, if a sex worker has been raped and/or abused by a client it is almost impossible for her to reach the justice system and to go to court and have the violent client convicted. The testimony of a sex worker, possibly, could mean something to her family or in front of a particular judge.

Sexual violence against sex workers may occur when the sex worker insists on safe sex. Many male clients still do not want to use condoms. Sex workers may not even bring up the issue of safer sex for fear of a violent response. Clients are less will to pay as much for sex with condoms. Some may offer more money for unprotected sex. Sex work is competitive, and the sex worker may not be in a strong enough position financially to refuse a client.

A study in the City of Panama (2004) showed that, although condom use with clients is almost 100%, sex workers are still vulnerable to HIV and STI infection. This is because they seldom use condoms with their steady partners and because they are at risk of rape by clients, especially when they consume a lot of alcohol or drugs and work on the streets. High levels of violence and rape mean a high level of unprotected sex and increased risk for contracting HIV. According to the report by Koss and Heslet (1992), it was noted that between 4% and 30% of rape victims contracted sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

A study conducted with Aboriginal 183 street sex workers in Vancouver's street level sex trade, Canada (Cler-Cunningham and Christenson, 2001) found 10 forms of

violence against street sex workers including harassment, robbery, physically being threatened, threatened with a weapon, physically assaulted without a weapon, assaulted with a weapon, forced to have sex against their will, forced to have sex against their will with a weapon involved, kidnapped/confined, and attempted murder. According to this study, 57 % of street sex workers reported to be forced to have sex against their will and 38 % had been forced to have sex against their will with a weapon involved. This study also found that a violent incident had happened to them more than once in the past year but they did not record or report any of the incidents to the police, and, nobody was ever convicted in any of the instances reported to the police.

Sex workers who had been sexually assaulted reported that they had been unfairly treated by both the legal and health system. They also stated that when they had reported these offences to police they had not been believed and not given the necessary victim support to proceed with criminal charges against the offenders (Waldenez. de Oliveira, 2001). In addition, there is a perception amongst service women that there are people in positions of authority who feel that service women deserve to be raped, or see it largely as a part of their job. Sex workers experience this to a much greater degree due to the prevailing attitudes to sex work. According to Lopez-Jones (1999) in discussing societal attitudes towards prostitution and the response of the police to sexual attacks on women who work on the streets: “women and children who try to survive through prostitution are. . .criminalized and accused of ‘attracting’ violence. In this way, the victim, rather than the attacker, is blamed for the violence she suffers. When sex workers report violence the police often dismiss the attack as ‘part of the job,’ accuse the woman of ‘asking for it’ or even threaten her with arrest”.

Such attitudes may result in many sex workers feeling that no one will believe they have been sexually assaulted. Moreover, because of the stigma associated with prostitution and the tendency to place blame for the assault on the victim herself, police may give low priority to cases involving sexual violence against service workers.

## **2.5 Context of Lao PDR**

### **2.5.1 General Context**

The Lao PDR is a small, landlocked country located in Southeast Asia. It shares its borders with China to the north, Myanmar to the Northwest, Thailand to the west, Cambodia to the south, and Vietnam to the east. The Lao PDR has an area of 236,800 square kilometers. One of its great features is the Mekong River, which flows from the north to the south for almost 1,900 kilometers.

Because of the geographical position of the country as a land corridor, this creates a two-fold challenge. It creates favorable conditions in the area of trade, tourism and communication in the region and an opportunity for the Lao PDR to cooperate with other countries for future development. However, the economic disparity between Lao PDR and its neighbors stimulates transnational trafficking of women, girls and children and increases vulnerability to exploitation.

### **2.5.2 Demography**

The Lao PDR presently has a population of 5,609,997 (2005), which has 2,813,589 women and 2,796,448 men with an annual growth rate of 2.5 percentage. Approximately 83% of the population lives in rural areas. Over 70% of its terrain is mountainous and hills. The average population density is 19.3 persons per sq. km. There are 68 recognised ethnic groups, but the three major categories commonly used are “*Lao Loum*” for lowland Laotians, “*Lao Theung*” for middle-land ethnic groups and “*Lao Soung*” for highlanders. However, over 60% of populations are under the age of 25, and 55% of the populations are under the age of 19, and a family’s members averaging of six or more children are common in Laos.

While the population size is small and density is low, there are several important implications for current and prospective rates of population growth. The social and

economic system, which already faces the challenge of raising the quality of the services to acceptable levels for the existing population, will face the prospect of having to provide basic social services to an increasing population.

### **2.5.3 Administration**

Administratively the country is divided into 16 provinces, one capital (Vientiane), one special region (Xaysomboon), 142 districts, and about 11,400 villages. There are 748,529 households with an average size of 6.0 people. A woman heads 11% of households.

From a geographical and economic development standpoint, the Lao PDR can be divided into three regions:

1. A northern region which is composed of 7 provinces: Phongsaly, Luangnamtha, Oudomxay, Bokeo, Laungprabang, Huaphanh and Xayabury
2. A central region with 6 provinces and 1 special region: Vientiane the capital, Xienkuang, Vientiane province, Borikhamxay, Khammuane, Savannakhet, and Xaysomboon the Special Region.
3. A southern region with 4 provinces: Saravane, Sekong, Champasack, and Attapeu.

### **2.5.4 Socio-Economic Situation**

Since the economic liberalization of 1987, the government of Lao PDR has been working towards healing war wounds and improving its people's living conditions, with particular attention paid to eradicating poverty. The economy of the Lao PDR is essentially agrarian, where agriculture occupies more than 50% of its economy, while service and industry occupy 26% and 24% respectively. Noteworthy is the fact that about 80% of the population depends on agriculture as a livelihood. The government has been concerning itself with creating a positive future for the next generation through poverty reduction. There is admittedly more work to be done by the

government of Lao PDR regarding poverty reduction (as the ultimate goal is poverty eradication), however, Lao PDR has seen some progress.

Most ethnic minorities live on subsistence production and the majority is poor because of the geographic location, traditional mode of production, lack of basic services due to road barriers and inaccessibility. As a result, they have limited education, health and other basic necessities of life. In general, it is difficult for them to access health facilities, and the health workers also find it difficult to access them, particularly during the rainy season. Most of the ethnic minorities have retained most of their traditional languages and culture, and have little regular schools, especially for higher education. They also have limited teachers because of inaccessibility. In some cases, social and community development workers walk for more than four days to reach the ethnic minorities. Most children of ethnic minorities do not go to school because their parents need their help with agricultural production.

The UN has classified the Lao PDR as a least developed country with an estimated per capita income of US\$ 320 in 2003, one of the poorest countries in the East Asia region. Today, nearly 73% of its population live on less than US\$2 a day, and 25% live on less than US\$1 a day. The main employment of people is the agricultural and fishery sectors. This involves 85.5% of the total economically active population. Of these 54.2% were women and 45.8% were men.

Currently, the infrastructure of the provinces is still low in the Lao PDR, particularly in the rural areas. Only 19% of the rural villages have electric and 9 out of 10 villages lack any kind of market. Less than half of the villages are accessible by truck in the rainy season. In all the provinces in the north except Bokeo and Xayabury provinces, half or more of the villages cannot be reached by truck even in the dry season. The south is better off, but not very good.

### 2.5.5 Legislation

There are several articles in the penal code that forbid or protect people against rape, incest, pornography, abortion and prostitution. Some of the articles institute more severe punishments for crimes committed against girls and children than they do for crimes against adults, is follows:

- **Article 120**—on the rape children, the punishment for having sexual relations with a male or female child below the age of 15 is imprisonment for between 1 to 5 years.
- **Article 122** of the penal code protects minors from being prostituted. In addition any person who engages in commercial sexual relations as a form of income, or any person who assists the person in engaging in prostitution, are punishable by law with sentencing ranging from between 3 months to one year.
- **Article 123** punishes with imprisonment ranging from 6 months to 3 years anyone who obtains an income by producing persons for prostitution. If the person who is produced for prostitution is below 18 years old or is under the offender's responsibility and is forced to be prostituted the punishment is imprisonment ranging from 3 to 5 years.
- **Article 124** punishes the act of sexual relations with a close family member, including children by imprisonment of six months to one year.

## **2.6 Gender Practices in the Lao PDR**

### ***2.6.1 Role of Lao Women***

Like almost all societies in the world, the Lao PDR is also a patriarchal society, with male domination and female subordination. In general, women and men are expected to be taught different gender roles. It is very common that children are involved in the fieldwork since early childhood, commencing from 6 years old. The parents need also their help with the household chores, livestock rearing, and collection of food from the forests. The girls help the mothers to take care of the siblings and the household chores; the boys help their fathers with hunting and taking care of big livestock. Women and girls are more disadvantaged among the ethnic minorities. However, the livelihoods of many ethnic minorities depend on women as providers of food and care for the family's subsistence.

Gender gaps exist in several areas and are wider among ethnic minorities. They do not recognize women's rights to own property except under specific circumstances. All ethnic minority cultures assign women heavier workloads rather than men for food production, income generation, domestic work, and maintenance of cultural traditions. While customary laws prohibit them from inheriting land (depending upon the culture and circumstances), ethnic minority women living in traditional communities, do have access to land for food and livestock production, and collection of forest produce. According to the report on "Gender and Aquaculture in Lao PDR, UNDP/FAO, 1998" it mentioned that in many rural areas women continue to feel that they are inferior to men, and may not be confident enough to express their opinions to promote their rights and benefits. Rural women may not be aware of their own priorities and needs.

Bolstering the production of service women is a low regard for women and girls throughout much of the region. For a complex variety of social, cultural and religious reasons, daughters too often do not enjoy the same standing as sons. While stereotypical gender roles are being challenged, girls are still being brought up to assume the subordinate roles of their mothers. In some communities, parents believe that it is better to invest in a son rather than a daughter who may one day marry and

leave the family. The girl may also feel an extra sense of duty to repay her parents, and this, in turn, may influence her willingness to submit to sex work or other forms of abuse.

GRID (2004) reported that recent data show that women occupy low positions in management and few senior positions at all levels of government. Women are still underrepresented in the parliament. It is worth mentioning, however, there has been an increase in the number of women in the Lao Assembly, from 21 women (21.2%) in the Fourth National Assembly in 1997-2002 to 25 women (22.9%) in the Fifth National Assembly in 2002-2007. From the year 1994 to the present, the number of women ministers has increased by one. A total of two female ministers are members of the 38-member cabinet of ministers. Out of the 79 vice-ministers 5 are women. The provincial governor represents the Prime Minister and the government in the province and is appointed by the President on the Prime Minister's proposal. The governor is the highest-ranking official in that level. Out of the 18 provincial governors one is a woman. In each province, there are also two deputy governors who are direct assistants of the governor. They are also appointed officials. No women have been appointed as deputy governors at this point in time. The district chief represents the state in his or her territorial unit but he or she exercises his or her functions under the governor's directions. The district chief is responsible for the implementation of the constitution, the laws and instructions issued by the highest authorities. The district chief is elected every two years. There are two female district chiefs out of 141.

Though a lot has been achieved in terms of advancement of women in political participation at the national level there are still many factors preventing women from participating in politics at local levels. Some of the contributing factors can be traced back to Lao traditions and culture.

Throughout their life cycle, most Lao women are surrounded by limitations. As grown-ups, they rarely have opportunities to be active in society, for example, through participation in village meetings in order to express their opinions on various topics or to give information. Therefore, they rarely have experience in speaking and expressing their opinions in public forums, which would give them a chance to develop their

communication skills. According to a recent report issued by the GRID (1999) women often do not like to go to meetings because they do not know how to read, are afraid they won't understand the topic, and don't want to speak. They rarely desire to be leaders in specialized areas such as politics or leaders in their community because being a leader means meeting a high standard. They often think that they are not capable, because these positions require a broad range of knowledge and experience, courage to make decisions, and strength.

Tradition and culture have created an image of women as one who should be gentle, warm, beautiful, likeable and pleasing to all. If a woman is a leader, there will unavoidably be occasions when she must displease someone, since she will be in charge of many people. Moreover, an acceptance of the social perception that leadership roles only fit with male personality characteristics leads most women to think that even if women have ability, women are still inferior to men, especially at the higher leadership levels (GRID, 1999).

#### **4.6.2 *Marriage and Family***

Different ethnic groups in the Lao PDR have different family structures and different traditions in terms of marriage and family life. In the main Lao group, the mode of living is principally matrix-local, the youngest daughter normally inherits the land, and the couple traditionally stays in the wife's parents household. It is often the youngest daughter who is expected to take care of the parents in their old age. Sons marry outside the family and live with their in-laws. The bride price practice is common within this group since according to LWU survey (1999) 87% of marriages husband paid a bride price. The women in the main Lao group have a strong role in economic activities inside the family. Despite the support of the matrilineal structure, women in the Lao ethnic group have a politically and socially subordinate position when compared to men.

Common to all ethnic groups is the traditional division of labour in the family since the responsibility for the work of caring for the family falls heavily on the

women's side. Work such as preparing food, fetching water and mainly the women gather firewood, cleaning the house, looking after the children, nurse the sick, make and wash clothes and all other daily work that is essential to the care and well-being of the family. In addition, women are also important participants in the area of agricultural production and they play an important role as cash-income earners. In other words, most women in the Lao society carry double workloads: household work and work in the economic sphere.

#### **4.2.3 Decision Making in the Family**

In the Lao PDR, social and cultural beliefs cause women to have less voice in decision-making as well as within the family and the community. So far as the household and community leadership is concerned, it is mostly the men who hold management and decision-making position. In the LWU (2005) report on the "*Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*" it is mentioned that men must be strong, must lead the family, and must be the representative of the family in society. Men are considered the appropriate ones to be the leaders in the society. Women must be gentle, self-effacing, good housewives, caretakers of the husband and children, and followers who stay in the background. In other words, a wife must defer to her husband in all things, and most particularly in matters of social status. This is even though women are extremely active in primary responsibility for their households' food requirements and women work longer hours than men do. Women are often regarded as responsible for the family's food security, health, and well-being.

According to the report on "Gender Issues in Micro and Small Enterprises in the Lao PDR, GRID (2004)" it is mentioned that men are described as the '*heads of household*', and women as the '*deputies*'. As head of the household, men represent the family at all official meetings. There are no perceived contradictions between men being the decision-maker for activities, which are performed by women (i.e. chicken and pig raising, and embroidery). All parties feel that women perform their activities

for the benefit of the household, and men also '*obtain*' the benefits of the household that women give.

In the Lao PDR, decision-making is influenced by the matrilineal traditions that are practiced by some ethnic groups. For example, women's traditional role as managers of the household money in lowland communities has led to the expression "*women are the ministers of Finance and of the Interior*"—an expression which is still used by men today jokingly to describe their wife's role. The information from GRID survey in 1999 showed that respondents reported different patterns of decision-making in family matters according to the subject. Concerning daily expenditure, 57% (1363 out of 2399 households) reported that women decided this matter by herself. Of the 852 households that responded to the question about decision-making in investments, 32% reported that the man made the decision, 19% reported that the woman made the decision, and 45% reported that both decided together. Investments in the Lao context most likely refers to spending on items that will improve the family's ability to earn an income—such as water buffalo or tractors to plow the land, fertilizers and pesticides, or spending on the materials needed to start a small home-based business

A recent GRID (2003) study indicated that 15.4 % either of women's enterprises, investment decisions are taken jointly with the spouse or by the spouse; only 5% of men involve their spouse in investment decisions. For public contracts, the difference is even greater, with 34% of women entrepreneurs involving the spouse, while only 8% of male entrepreneurs involve the spouse in these decisions; and for legal documents, 35.4% of women engage the spouse, while 5% of male entrepreneurs do so.

The village chief exercises his or her duties under the supervision of the district chief. At the village level, the chief is responsible for ensuring the application of the laws, the regulations and the instructions issued by the higher authorities. The village chief is also the peacekeeper at the grassroots. He or she is the arbitrator in conflicts between the villagers. The village chief is thus an important element in the Lao legal system. There are 88 female village chiefs out of the total 8,505. The village chief has

a deputy village chief to assist him or her in his or her tasks. Out of the 12,491 deputy village chiefs 236 are women.

## **2.7 Conceptual Framework**

The study uses a feminist theoretical perspective, in order to explain why service women encounter sexual violence under a patriarchal system. The conceptual framework contains five dimensions: (1) gender relations in term of gender inequality between men and women (2) socio-demographic characteristics of service women (including profile and experience); (3) Sexuality of service women; (4) Social relationship of service women; and (5) Risk factors (including alcohol consumption and drug use).

This study will also explore the form of sexual violence and the consequences of sexual violence against service women (including injury, help and health seeking). More specifically, this study will explore these dimensions as they contribute to the occurrence of sexual violence against service women and the consequences of sexual violence. This framework is illustrated in Fig. 1.

### ***Below is a detailed explanation of the proposed dimensions:***

1. Patriarchy serves as a macro level in explaining why service women experience sexual violence. Patriarchal social structure, the fundamental cause of violence against women are considered to be power, control and gender role stereotypes regarding devaluation of women. Within patriarchal social systems, gender inequality between men and women is determined. Men are in the position of dominance, demanding and getting what they want. Men are socialized to have sexual desires whereas women are socialized to meet those desires and to internalize and accepted the definition of femininity and sexual objectivity. Prostitution has been viewed as a situation where men have reduced women to an image of being mere sexual objects. Men may

allow oppressing and coercing women in order to satisfy their own needs through prostitutes.

2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the service women is posited in the framework as the background information which is associated with sexual violence against service women. Most service women come from poor families, having migrated from the remote rural areas of the country in search of work in the city. They are young in age, and lack education. Some of them may be from an ethnic minority group. These characteristics may lead the service women inability to negotiate and more easily to be sexually exploited and abused. Moreover, sex work in Laos is illegal and highly socially stigmatized. This means that service women's receive poor legal and societal protection and support, compared with other citizens, and must often work secretly. These characteristics put them in a vulnerable position to abuse and violence.

Experience and life of service women will be a contextual factor contributing to sexual violence against service women. Most service women enter the sex industry based on economic difficulties and problems. They think that sex work is their only option. They may have experienced abuse in the family and specifically are forced to enter into sex service. These aspects will be the powerful grounds for service women being trapper in the cycle of violence. Condom use/nonuse is also a factor of vulnerability to contacting HIV and STI and thus, includes sexual violence. This is because the client may not want to use a condom.

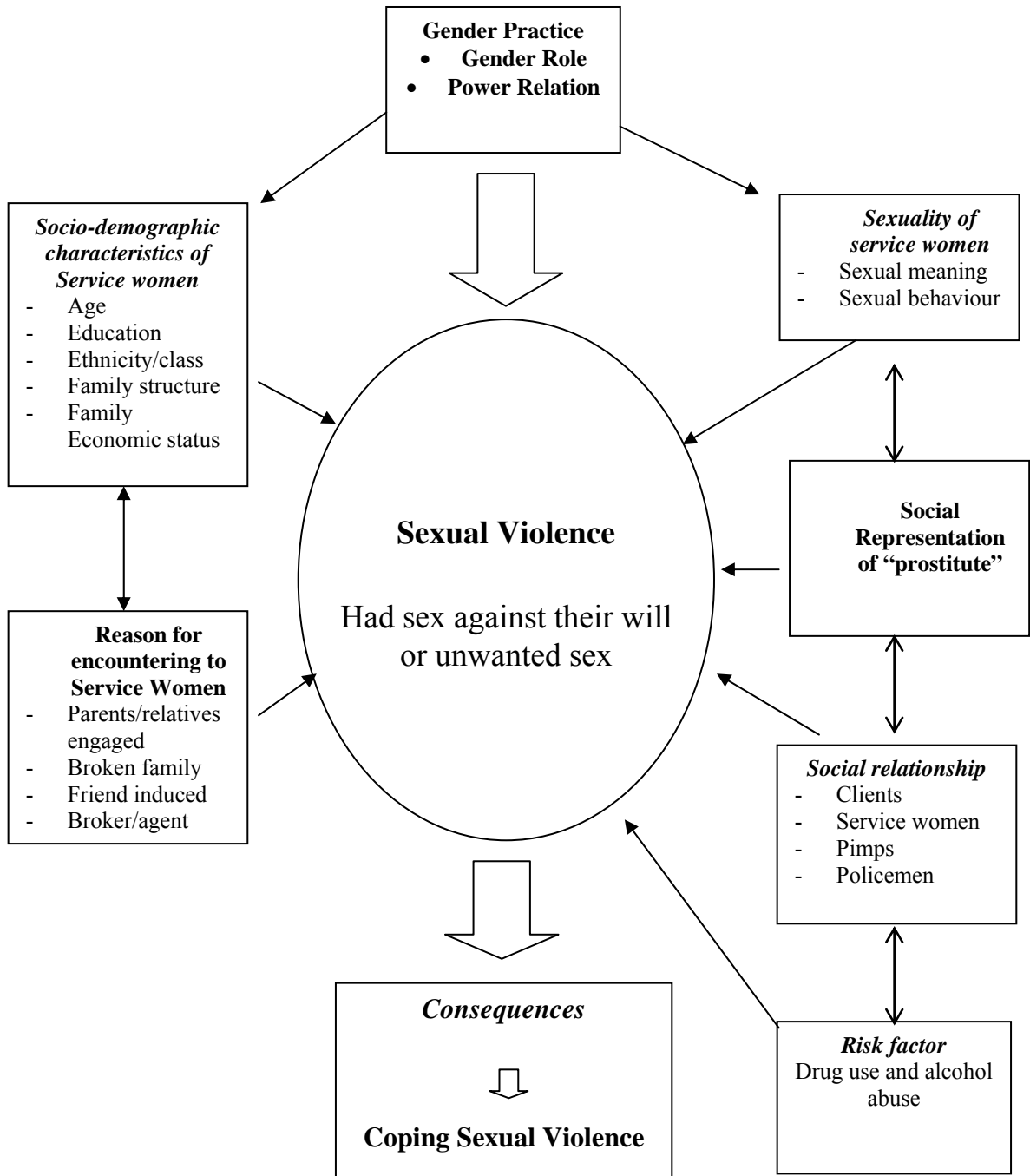
3. Social Relationships will be a contextual factors contributing to sexual violence against service women. As sexual violence against service women takes place from different quarters; clients, regular partners, pimps and police. Sex workers tend to have minimal contact with clients. The clients take her to stay overnight somewhere else which is unknown to her. This situation leads to endangering service women to sexual violence. Considering the relationship between service women

and those situations will help to know the power relationships and support relations affecting sexual violence against service women.

4. Sexuality of Service Women—sexuality of service women refers to sexual meanings, sexual behaviours and partner and sexual representations. The self-concept and their sexual representation toward their job may contribute to the occurrence of sexual violence. Women in prostitution fall squarely into the category of '*bad and dirty women*' by the society. Service women are generally stigmatized and misunderstood in the society and largely influenced by myths, the media, and morals. Sexual act is related to the number of clients in a day and who their clients are, which also makes service women vulnerable to violence.
5. Risk factors including alcohol and drug consumptions serving as situational contexts, which lead service women at risk of sexual violence. Service women tend to be exposed to substance abuse as a means of dealing with stress caused by being a prostitute itself, and as a way for women to detach themselves from the realities of their work. The use of drugs or alcohol may be insisted on or forced by the clients or pimps in order to enhance their feeling in serving sex with clients. Many researchers believe that alcohol and drugs operate as a situational factor, increasing the likelihood of violence by reducing inhibitions and impairing the individual's ability to control themselves.

The phenomena of sexual violence against service women can be seen as societal unfairness or injustice. The relationship between service women and clients, police, pimps or shop owners, whether in the sense of individual, relationship, community or structural level. This model should be applied integrally to give a clear understanding about the context, factors affecting the violence and lead to a strategy to prevent and stop the sexual violence against service women.

**Conceptual Framework**



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study uses qualitative research design in order to explore the social, cultural and situational contextual factors under which sexual violence takes place. The methods of data collection include in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observation. This qualitative research is expected to help to deepen understanding on the context of sexual violence of service women and to understand the phenomena of sexual violence against service women from their own's point of views.

#### 3.2 Research Sites

Vientiane, the capital of Lao PDR, was the place chosen for the research field. Vientiane capital located on the bank of the Mekong River shares the border with Thailand to the west, and is the largest city with a population of 695,473 (2005), women are 349,194 and men are 346,279. Vientiane capital is the center of culture, commerce and administration in the Lao PDR. Vientiane capital possesses a diversity of light industry and is a trading center for forest products, textiles, garment factories, and includes service sectors such as restaurants and hotels. It is attractive not only to foreigners for visiting, but also to Lao people for finding a job in the city. Particularly the younger generation who do not cross the Mekong to Thailand, are likely move to Vientiane capital. Many commodities are ferried across the Mekong to Thailand, where they are transported by rail to Bangkok. Chinese and Vietnamese minorities dominate retailing and commerce in Vientiane capital.

Vientiane capital is increasing gaining access to national and international markets with the development of highway networks. Improved and more reliable electrical power networks and digital telecommunications are supporting this urban

economic growth. As a result of the new economic policies of the government urban economic developments in the country accelerated causing on the one hand physical growth in urban areas and on the other hand the increase in environmental problems such as air pollution, a dense and crowded city population, and solid waste etc.

Although, there are nine districts in the Vientiane capital and five districts in the prefecture, I have selected two districts, namely Sisattanak and Sikhottabang as the study areas. These target districts represent Vientiane capital as they include urban and suburban areas of the city. In addition, during the data collection period, as it was the rainy season, these areas were selected due to ease of transportation.

Furthermore, the samples of service women living in both these two districts can be counted for as representative of service women living in other districts and provinces that have similar characteristics and life experiences.

Service women in Vientiane Capital are working in different places such as beer-shops, nightclubs and on the street. In this study, I selected service women who are working in the Small Beer shops (Hunnoy) as a target study. The small beer shop are regarded as the entertain place in which service women provide sexual service directly. The details of sex service places are described as follows:

### **3.2.1 Small Beer Shop (Hunnoy)**

Small beer shops have been increasing in Vientiane capital during the past few years since Lao PDR reformed its economic structure to promote a free market economy and private sector development. However, sex service in small beer shops is forbidden. If the government knows of any shops that do not follow the rules and provide sex service or sex trade, they will be closed and punished by imprisonment.

A small beer shop is called in Lao "*Hunnoy*" which is mostly for men who are looking to a buy sex from women and girls. As the sex industry in the Lao PDR is illegal, the existence of sex services tends to be kept in hidden. It is just a small beer

shop, so if you have never been there before, you will not know that is a place where you can buy sex. For example, in the first stage of searching for informants I went there by following the direction of one of my male friends. There were many girls at the shops around there selling sex. I went there but I did not approach a shop, because it looked like an “*original house*”. The small beer shop usually has about three to five tables inside the house and a few people in front of the shop. However, when I told a large man who was sitting in front of the shop that I would like to drink beer with a service girl and asked him if there were any service girls, he told me to wait a few minutes. Then, surprisingly, five young and beautiful girls came forth from the back of the shop.

There are more than twenty small beer shops in each district in the research study area. The location of the beer shops is more likely in the surrounding suburbs, not in the center of the city. The beer shops are small. Some have small colored lights and the logo of Beer Lao attached in front of the shops. Some shops are run at the owner’s house. The majority of the shops are located on the side street and near the main road. The shops are open in the daytime depending on whenever clients come then and at nighttime. They usually close around midnight or later. There are three to seven girls working at a shop. However, the shops have the girls for serving beer, food and making conversation with clients. The price of food and beer are double a (for beer about US\$1.3 per bottle) compare to outside (normal shops).

Actually, service women who work at the small beer shop do not have a salary, but from selling beer they receive a percentage that is around US\$.20 per bottle. Many of them may get a tip from a client. Additionally, they all provide sexual service in exchange for money. They have two types of sexual service requiring different payments such as:

1. “*going out for sexual service with a client for a whole night,*” a client has to pay at least US\$25 that is depended on negotiation, and

2. *“going out for sexual service for a period of time”* that is for not more than two hours, a client has to pay at least US\$13 per time, this means the client could have sex only one time; if he wants more he has to pay extra.

Service women have to pay deposits to the shop owner of around US\$4 per time for going out for sexual service with a client.

### **3.2.2 Nightclub**

Nightclubs refer to the place where people come to dance and drink and look for a service woman in a higher price bracket. There are more than fifteen nightclubs in these two districts of the research study areas. In each nightclub, more than twenty service women are working to serve beer, food and have conversations with clients, as clients require. They do not have salary but receive a percentage of around US\$0.3 from selling drink per bottle. Beside this, they all are likely providing sexual service for exchange the money. They have only one conditional that provide sexual service for a whole night with the cost around US\$ 25.

The location of the nightclubs is in the center of the city in a big building. The nightclubs open around 8 pm and close around midnight. For the nightclubs, anyone can go, men and women, but they must be above 18 years old. The price of food and beer are double a (beer US\$1.5 per bottle) compared to outside.

For the girl or woman who works at a bar or nightclub, she is called “Saoding<sup>1</sup> or Karee<sup>2</sup>”, which refers to a higher priced service women. They tend to have richer clients; one having the big position, lot of money or like foreigners or businessmen etc. The bargirls all have more experience sexual service usually for several years. Their average age is over twenty years old, but less than thirty. They usually wear very

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<sup>1</sup> Saoding is a young woman who work at bar or nightclub. Her responsibilities are for serving food, drinks and having conversation with clients; this she would provide sex service.

<sup>2</sup> Karee is a lady who provides sex service directly in exchange for the materials gain or money.

sexy clothes styled like a model and use mobile phone, car, etc. They appear different from ordinary women; their styles are to attractive men who want sex for money.

However, the price of girl of this style is high; start about US\$25 or more per night or as negotiator with the client. However, bargirls do not go for a period of time, they go out for the whole night with a client. This means that for a night they would go out with only one client. Some of them work permanently at the bar, at a karaoke or a nightclub, but some of them do the freelance services; they also come to the bar, karaoke place or nightclub but for only finding clients.

### **3.3 Target Groups**

The target samples were the migrant service women aged less than 25 years old, who are working residentially in a small beer shop. A snowball technique was used in order to reach the target sample. I conducted the in-depth interviews of 9 service women, focus group discussions with three groups; each discussion group had about three to five informants. I also interviewed two key informants, who are pimps and shop owner (mamas). Regarding the interview sites, all were interviewed at beer shop. The target group in the study was selected with purposive sampling method as explained the following methods.

#### **3.3.1 Finding Target Group**

When I met the service women, I talked with them once before asking for their consent to participate in in-depth interview, which follows the concept of interview outline preparing. I introduced myself to them (target group) that I am a master's student from Mahidol University of Thailand, who is doing a thesis and is interested in studying service women's experiencing with unwanted sex (had sex against their will) from their own point of view.

There are three stages that I used in order to find the target group of my research, which follows below:

- **Firstly**, I asked some of my male friends and other persons who used to visit a place with service women working at a site within the two target districts. I spent around a week asking about ten people in order to get the valid information and to be sure that I would meet the expected target samples.
- **Secondly**, at the small beer shops I met service women by pretending to be a client; I also got help from a service woman in order to be able to approach service women. She took me into about ten shops to meet the pimp/mama. I tried to make friends with them and asked to visit another time. For this stage I spent about two weeks time in order to observe and design how to get date, where could get it, how many important to get and how much time to spend, because service women have little and limited time for me. For example while, I was interviewing an informant her client called and made an appointment with her. Sometimes, I had to stop the interview at a moment and make on appointment with her for the next day.
- **Thirdly**, I met service women by asking the permission from the pimp or mama. Besides this, I needed the cooperation from a pimp/mama because he/she could not deny informants to concentrate her attention or me. If she was busy with her client at the time. Even with that some pimps did not allow me to interview her/his service women. Alternatively, even if he/she gave me permission, the service women had a limited time to have conversation and if her client came, I had to stop and make an appointment for the next day.

### 3.3.2 Selecting Target Group

I used a snowball technique to select the target group. The technique consists of the following steps:

- After making an observation, I made a plan and designed the method for interviewing a case to be having the required characteristics. I also asked them to indicate another case with the same and different characteristics in order to get a diversity of information
- However, it is significant to search out the informants at different location as much as I could and had time, following or not follow the criteria in order to be a friend and establish familiarity with the informant and location.

In the research study, creating relationships to build reliability is necessary, thus making the target group dare to converse openly with me. After I carried out in-depth interviews and established empathy (translate in Lao) with the target group to some extent, I used a snowball technique, in they, I asked them about other friends who had characteristics as service women (others small beer shop) and asked them how to contact and make an appointment with them. Such a method allows a wider social network and information sources.

### **3.4 Procedure of Data Collection**

#### **3.4.1 Data Collection Method**

I carried out the data collection from July-October 2005. The data collection techniques consists of in-depth interviews, observation and focus group discussions on issues of the daily lifestyle of service women at work places and with their families; the reason for becoming a service woman; problems met and how they solved or resolved particular the problem of sexual violence; how they are represent themselves. The data obtained from the three techniques were combined, which grave a clearer image of the social and cultural context of service women at risk to sexual violence and their reason for becoming service women.

### ***3.4.1.1 Non Participant Observation***

Observation provided information about the individual's actual behavior. Direct observation of behavior was useful for this topic because some behavior had involved habitual routines, and a sensitive of personal issues such as sexual violence, tends service women to hardly give information and answer the right questions freely. Observations could reveal more information than other data collection methods. Direct observation also allowed the researcher to put behavior in context, and thereby understand it better. I observed service women working by going into the small beer shop as a supposed client.

### ***3.4.1.2 Focus group discussion***

Focus group discussions were conducted to provide greater insight into information on the topics of service women's lives including perception related with sexual violence and the context related to working as service women. I conducted three focus groups discussions. Each group consisted of three to five service women at a beer shop. This was intended to revealing the comprehensive context of the group opinions of service women, who are always at risk of to violence. It was quite difficult to conduct focus group discussions with service women because they had limited free time and they had to work whenever they had clients. However, I acted like their friend who offered warnings and gave them the knowledge about how to have save sex and avoid violence. The place for the focus group discussion was in the yard under the tree outside the beer shop. I could not take women for interviews far from the beer shop, because the pimps or mamas did not allow that as they had to work. The focus group discussions took at least two hours.

### ***3.4.1.3 In-depth interview***

I used the in-depth interview technique with the informants. Before an interview, I introduced myself to each informant and then explained the objectives of the study, interview topic, interview duration and confidentiality of the study. In addition, I

asked for their permission to record their voice. During the interview, I also made an observation on their reaction—facial expression, manner and concentration on the conversation to see whether or not they were still ready to continue giving me their information. Before each interview, I told each informant that the interview might take a long time, at least one or two hour and that whenever they would like to stop the interview we would. Informants were interviewed taking between 1.5 to 2 hours per time. However, some did not finish because they were very busy and had limited time so that it was needed to go on to the next day. Key informants were interviewed which took two hours per one time. For example, one of my interviewees, during interviewing she had a client come who wanted to take her out with him. In this situation, I had to stop and ask her to continue the interview next time.

This research is sensitive in term of dealing with personal issues; with privacy such as sexual behavior in particular there is needed to have a confidential interview known only by each informant and me. Moreover, because I am a man, there might be problems relating to gender barriers in studying sexual violence among service women. However, I tried to establish rapport by acting as your friend and brother. Before interviewing, I said to them please respect me like as their friend or brother. I sat very close with them, talked and listened to what they were talking about. Many of them told me that they would like to talk about their stories related with sexual violence against them, but no one listens, it was good to talk with me, they said. One service woman cried while she was talking about her problem and family story.

### **3.4.2 Research Instrument**

*Research instrument in the research consists of:*

- **Interview guidelines**—I used it for in-depth interview (that had covered the objectives, concepts of the research study and framework. It included general information (i.e. history of service women and their family); service women context (service women's resource and social cultural context); sexuality of service women (sexual meaning of service women, sexual behavior and partners, and sexual

representation); social relation (clients, polices, regular partners and pimps); risk behavior of drug use and alcohol; and health seeking, which meant to find out of how they cope with the sexual violence against them. At first, I used the interview guidelines for an in-depth interview with an ordinary non service woman to test the preciseness of the questionnaires. After that, I used the interview guidelines as an instrument to collect data.

- **Recorder**— I used a recorder to record the data from in-depth interview with some of interviewee, who were interesting. Before recording each interview, I needed to ask for permission from the informant.
- **Field note**—Daily notes were used is additional data for data analysis. In the study, it was used to record conversation with the informants' friends and key informant, who were at ease and know to me.

### 3.5 Process of Data Analyses

Actually, the data analysis was begun during data collection. Although it is not completed yet. Data collected from qualitative methods were transcribed to understand the content of each respondent in order to get thorough results. All the data was sorted and coded in order to identify gaps in the data. Data was organized every day and compared to the previous one.

The Process of data analysis in qualitative research can be gradually carried out from field the data collection, which is considered preliminary data analysis. When finishing data collection, it would be the final stage of data analysis. Qualitative data analysis has the following steps:

### 3.5.1 Verification of Data

During data collection by in-depth interviews, I verified the completeness of the data by listening to the recorder conversation after finishing each interview and wrote down issues of incomplete data for improvement every day. In addition, I verified the sufficiency of the collection data with my thesis advisor before data analysis.

### 3.5.2 Data Analysis

I carried out data analysis under the objectives of the research and the theoretical research framework. The data was classified and categorized to find its relation to the occurrence of sexual violence against service women. Information had been analyzed from the interview guidelines and observation. The information had been analyzed by using content analysis technique to group the similar focal point together. The issue of each sampling group had been studied and coded to analyze for supporting the concept. This conclusion led to an understanding of the complexity of sexual violence against service women.

### 3.5.3 Data Processing and Analysis

- **Data sorting** is the first step to organize the data, which was not used during the in-depth interview, because I could not stop women from talking about issues which are not related to this study. Sometimes, I got useful or sensitive data from the respondents. These were organized carefully by; systematic review of the transcripts, which linked to the research question. For the sorting data, the note cards were used for systematic analysis. In these ways it is easy to put in logical connections, one each other data, which were made by other informants in order to get similar statements or explanations.
  
- **Data Coding** is the next step to organize the note contents. This coding was done manually because only a few cases were easy to organize. As

a result of coding as tabulating data, the data was gathered and could be compared between informants and used to recognize the pattern of respondents answering. I had to read all the transcriptions of data obtained from the informants before doing textual analysis. After that, I coded the data under the theme and categories that were made from the obtained data.

- *Classification and categorization*—to facilitate data analysis, I classified each informant's code data according to the determined theme and categories.

### **3.6 Data Presentation**

The findings would be presented by descriptive method regarding the general information (i.e. history of service women and their family); service women context (service women's resource and social cultural context); sexuality of service women (sexual meaning of service women, sexual behavior and partners, and sexual representation); social relations (clients, police, regular partners and pimps); risk behavior of drug use and alcohol; and health seeking, to find out of how they cope to sexual violence against them.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

In terms of ethical consideration the following strategies were followed during data collection:

- 1) The researcher takes responsibility for all information that was gathered and must protect the identity of informants by not putting their identities in the interview outline, but gives a code for that.

- 2) This research was not to make respondents suffer some emotional distress while getting data. If the respondents did not really want to talk about their experience, they were allowed to drop out of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This chapter that follows describes the findings of the study. Firstly, it shows the profile of the respondents including location, age, education, ethnicity or religion, family structure, income generation of the family, history since childhood and experience thereafter. Secondly, it presents the experiences of life as a service woman and the experiences of sexual violence among service women. Finally, it describes their future expectations and how they prevent and cope with sexual violence.

#### **4.1 Service Women in the Lao Context**

Prostitution and the sex trade are strictly forbidden in the Lao PDR. Service women are defined as any women who work in a small beer shop, nightclub, karaoke or other bar or guesthouses, that have direct contact with patrons. Formal, brothel-based sex work does not appear in Laos, and prostitution is illegal. Defining and identifying women who sell sex for money in Laos can be particularly difficult. For women working in these establishments, service may include serving food and beer, having conversation with their customers, and negotiating a commercial sex transaction of varying kinds.

There are many reasons why women and girls become service women in exchange for material gain or money for sex. Because of rapid economic growth and socializing influence of neighboring countries, particularly Thailand, they want to have clothes and high-technology things such as mobile phone, car, etc. Some women become a prostitute because they need to support themselves and their families. Others enter the work as a prostitute because of premarital sex experience. Cultural norms in the Lao PDR discourage premarital sex and this may affect girls' low self-perception if they have had premarital sex. From the report "Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Lao PDR (UNICEF, 2000) it noted that a prostitute said, "I had sex with

my boyfriend and when he would not marry me, I decided to do this job because there was nothing to lose anymore”. Some of the women may have been lured to the work by friends, relatives, or strangers/agents who painted a picture of plentiful money and beautiful clothes without explaining the real nature of the work.

Besides, women and girls who are at the young age, lack education and working skills are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse or face violence. The report on “Behavioral Surveillance Survey Lao PDR, 2000-2001” (FHI, 2003) noted that the mean age of first sex among service women who ever had sex was 17.4, while service women who reported selling sex for money began commercial sex work on an average of 20 years of age. The report on the Baseline Survey for “Community Action for Preventing HIV/AIDS” in Lao PDR (ADB, 2002) also showed that among service women (36%) have only finished primary school and some had no education and were illiterate.

Society regards prostitution as a problem that affects the culture of Laos and society in an impure way. People think that women who enter into sex industry are bad and dirty as they destroy the family and culture without any reason. Their parents will not accept them if they get pregnant before getting married. If the parents know that they are working as service women, they cannot face the community because they think that this brings the family is standing to and a negative position adding bad luck, shames and embarrassment.

Service women may experience problems in the work place including violence and sexual violence. They are raped and forced to have sex against their will such as sex without using a condom, anal and oral sex and clients using objects. For example, the report on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Lao PDR, UNICEF, noted that girls reported, that customers did not pay as agreed and raped them when the customers did not want to use condoms. Others reported that pimps also had violently threatened them to make them provide sexual intercourse with them or clients.

Girls who works at the small beer shop named are called service woman or small shop girl “*Saohunnoy*<sup>3</sup> and *Karee*” refers to middleclass service women in Laos. Most of them just begin to be involved in sex industry. They all are very young; the average age is less than twenty years old and they have little experience with sexual service. They are usually hiding the fact from society that they are service women. For example, their style of clothes is just like ordinary women. If they were in the public place, no one would know that they are service women.

Most women who worked at small beer shops, need to stay at the shop, however, they have no salary, they just get a little money from selling beer in percentage about US\$.20 per bottle of beer. This means that if they would like to get more money they have to sell more than beer and go out for sex with clients. There are two conditions for going out for sex with a client, which is as follows:

- *Firstly*, going out for a time with client; this is just for about one hour, but not more than two hours. For this condition, usually a service woman names the price for service of about US\$13 or more per time depending on their negotiation and the kind of clients, but this price does not include cost for the guesthouse or hotel. Furthermore, if a service woman decides to go out with a client, they need to pay about US\$4 per time for as a fee to the pimp or mama-san; this is the rule of the small beer shop; and
- *Secondly*, going out for a whole night; this means that the service woman would stay with a client for the whole night. For this condition, usually a service woman names the price for service of about US\$25 or more per night, but this price does not include cost for the guesthouse or hotel. However, they also need to pay US\$4 as a fee to the pimp or mama-san.

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<sup>3</sup> Saohunnoy is a lady who works at the small drink shop (Small Beer shop). Her responsibilities are for serving food, drink and having conversation with clients; besides this she would provide sex service.

## 4.2 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Service Women

### 4.2.1 Age of Respondent

The sample of this study consisted of 16 service women aged between 16-22 years. Majority of them are less than 20 years. The average age of service women in this study is 18.6 years old. Most of the respondents migrated from the rural areas; four of them were from semi-urban area of Vientiane the capital, which is more than 50 kilometers away from the center. There are four respondents from the northern and central part of the Lao PDR. Thus, an analysis from the findings indicate that service women of a younger age may tend to be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, because they are newcomers to the city from rural areas, have less experience and lack information about the dangers of a working place. For the nature of sex work, age is an important issue for a woman who intends to be a service woman. Indeed most respondents said that in some instances one had to lie about their real age because “men like young women... we do not even mention that one has ever had a baby otherwise the man may think that you are already spent (already have sex)”.

*Table 1: Distribution of Respondent by Province of Origin*

| Province of Origin             | Number of respondent |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Northern Part Provinces</i> |                      |
| Louangnumtha                   | 2                    |
| Sayabury                       | 2                    |
| <i>Central Part provinces</i>  |                      |
| Laung Prabang                  | 2                    |
| Vientiane                      | 3                    |
| Vientiane capital              | 4                    |
| Bolikhamsay                    | 2                    |
| Thakhek district of Khammoung  | 1                    |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>16</b>            |

One respondent said: “I am from Phakading district of Bolikhamsay province. My village is not in the center of Phakading district; there is no road in the rainy season. If I would like to visit my home village I need to hire a small boat to go along the Phakading River, and it takes a long time, about three to four hours from Phakading center to the village.”

**Table 2: Age of Respondent**

| <i>Age of Respondent</i>         |                             |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Age of Respondent</i>         | <i>Number of respondent</i> |
| 16                               | 1                           |
| 17                               | 2                           |
| 18                               | 6                           |
| 19                               | 4                           |
| 20                               | 1                           |
| 22                               | 2                           |
| Total                            | 16                          |
| Average = <b>18.6</b> years old. |                             |

One key informant, a pimp, also emphasized that age is significant to be a service woman. He meant that a woman has to be a very young age in order to be attractive for clients. He emphasized that he dares to employ women over 20, but not over 25 years old, otherwise they would not have any clients and there would be no benefit. One mama also emphasized that most clients are usually looking for young girls in general and virgin girls in particular. She said that the businessman is willing to pay up to 500 US\$ for a young virgin girl for a night.

#### **4.2.2 Ethnicity**

Given the patriarchal and developing Lao society, Lao women, particularly women in the low position or disadvantaged group in the society (ethnics, sex workers) may be more likely to experience violence. As we learned in a previous

chapter Lao women, particularly minority women, are poor and remain in a subordinate position of men, nevertheless, most of the respondents are Laolum and there was only one woman from the “*Pounoy*<sup>4</sup>” ethnic minority group. However, she mentioned that she faced several forms of sexual violence such as the clients forced her to do all kinds of sexual activities, one time for gangs rape (three men) because she got drunk and could not control the situation. Other times, she was forced to have oral sex and clients used plastic penis several times. She also emphasized that all men wanted to have oral sex.

### 4.2.3 Education Levels

Most respondents have only basic educations. Most had not even finished primary school. Only four among all of them had completed primary school but could not go further to the first year of the lower secondary school. One of the respondents had no education at all.

**Table 3: Education of Respondent**

| <i>Education of Respondents</i>     |                             |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Levels of Education</i>          | <i>Number of Respondent</i> |
| No education                        | 1                           |
| Did not finish primary school       | 10                          |
| Finished primary school             | 1                           |
| Did not finish secondary            | 3                           |
| Finished secondary school (3 years) | 1                           |
| Total                               | 16                          |

One respondent said: “After my mother died my father got a new wife. Unfortunately, I studied only the first year of primary school and dropped of school when I was very young. My stepmother did not want

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<sup>4</sup> *Pouny* ethnic is one minority ethnicity of Laos.

me study any more she said that she did not have money to afford school for me, so she told me that I should dropout. ” (C-2, age is 19 years old)

Another respondent said: “Because of poverty, my parents could not afford for me to continue in school and I had to dropout after only the fifth year of primary school to help with household work. Although I am very young, I do earn some income for my family.” (C-8 age is 16 years old)

#### 4.2.4 Family Structure

The majority of respondents are from the families of a relatively big size; they have 4-8 siblings, including themselves. One respondent emphasized that she is from a poor and a large family because her parents got married at very young age when they were only 13 years old. She mentioned that her parents are 37 years old now, but her older brother is 22 years old.

**Table 4: Sibling of Respondent**

| <i>Sibling of Respondent</i> |                             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Number of Sibling</i>     | <i>Number of respondent</i> |
| 3                            | 3                           |
| 4                            | 2                           |
| 5                            | 4                           |
| 7                            | 5                           |
| 8                            | 2                           |
| Total                        | 16                          |

#### 4.2.5 Family Situation Contributing

The study found that five of all respondents were from broken families, in which the parents were separated or divorced or died. Accordingly, their father or mother got remarried and moved to other provinces with their new partners. All five said they

could not stay with the new family because they were often verbally abused, in particular they were harassed by stepfathers or abused by their stepmothers. One young woman asserted that her stepmother hired someone to rape her; without knowing she did not know why. Another respondent said that she lived with her grandmother since she was a child without knowing about her parents. Some of the respondents who live with their brothers or male kin reported that they were often hit, or harassed and raped by the male relatives.

One respondent said: “My stepmother didn’t like me. She abused me both physically and emotionally such as hitting, cursing me with bad words and sometimes hiding food from me as she wanted me and starve the whole day” (Case 2, 19 years old)

#### ➤ **Forced Marriage**

Three respondents reported that they were married when they were only 12, 13 and 16 years old. All were separated or divorced. Two had children and took responsibility to take care of their children. The common reasons in terms of getting married at a very early age is that the respondents said that they were forced to marry by their relatives or brothers, for example: “I am from a very poor family (farming) in Lounghnumtha province. Because of poverty...I had to live with my relatives because my parents could not feed me....When I was only 13 years old, I was forced to get married with a guy whom my relative selected.....I did not know this guy before, but I had to marry him. Then I had one child. My husband usually got drunk and used violence against me. Sometimes I was abused until I started bleeding. I was divorced and took my child with me” (Case-5, 25 years old)

#### ➤ **Physically and Sexually Abuse a From Family Member**

The research also found that service women were often faced with lots of problems in the family of origin. Most of them reported they had experienced physical, emotional and sexual abused by family members.

Another respondent mentioned that when she stayed with her uncle, he always got drunk and often hit and harassed and raped her when his wife was not at home. She said that even though these things happened, she had to stay with him, because her parents got remarried and thus, she had no place to stay and no one wanted her.

One respondent said: “Since my parents were separated (divorced), there were many problems happening in my life. I could not stay with my father, because his new wife did not like me. I also could not stay with my mother, because her new husband and his male relatives used to harass me and they raped me several times. I tried to tell what happened to me to my mother, but she did not believe me. Then I was afraid to complain anymore as my mother might ask me to leave home”

Another respondent said: “After my mother died, my father got married again....My stepmother hates me...She always uses vulgar language towards me and sometimes abused me. What I did was bad in her eyes.... She (the stepmother) often hid food and rice, because she always did not want me to eat. Several times, I had nothing to eat for the whole day....I was very depressed and suffered a lot.....I might say that instead of eating food, I took in my tears every day....I remember many times my stepmother asking someone to rape me while my father was outside.... They did not succeed because I ran out for help from the neighbor”

### **4.3 Reasons for Encountering Sex Industry**

This study found that there are several reasons for a woman to become a service woman such as being forced by parents and relatives, an escape from a broken family, and an inducement from agent/stranger or friends.

#### **4.3.1 *Parents and Relatives Involvement***

Two respondents said that a pimp came to their village and asked for permission from their parents to take them to work as service women. They mentioned that due to the poverty, hunger and hardship of their family their parents forced them to work in such places. The parents knew that this job is not good and unacceptable, but it could earn a lot of money and then they would help support the family. Another respondent said that her relative forced her to go to work with his friend because she had to find food for herself. In the beginning, she did not know who the friend of her relative was or what she was going to do but later she found out that he was a pimp and the job was sex services.

One respondent said: “A mama-san (small beer shop owner) came to the village in order to find service workers.... My parents knew exactly what the nature of job was. It was as a service woman, which was a bad and dirty job, particularly one that society does not accept, but they did not care. They thought that it is the only a way I could have a job and this job is high pay ...I have low education, why do I have to think too much. On the other hand, I have nothing to lose. I have already lost my virginity to my boyfriend. Therefore, I decided to do this job as a service woman without any complaint. Otherwise I would have no job and no money for surviving and supporting the family”. (Case-8, 16 years old)

#### **4.3.2 Broken Family**

A large majority of the respondents ran away from home. On average respondents had run away one or two times. Reasons given for running away included poverty, lack of freedom and physical, emotional abuse including sexual violence.

This study found that family problems are common among the respondents. Five respondents stated that they faced several kinds of family problem such as poverty, hunger and hardship of family; parents separated or divorced; and parents died while they were very small children. The most commonly stated problems were relationships with someone (particularly stepparents) in the family, domestic violence and excessive

corporal punishment. Those who had grown up with a stepfather or a stepmother encountered a number of problems including emotional, physical and sexual abuse. These problems were evident in all cases of this study.

One respondent said: “After my mother died, it was not too long time until my father got a new wife. I was staying with them, but it was too hard because my stepmother did not like me....She likely blamed me in everything I did and this lead my father to dislike me, too. Finally, I thought that I had to run away from them” (Case 3, 18 years old)

Another respondent said: “After my parents divorced, I did not know where to go and live with whom whether father and mother....Both of them seemed not to welcome me to live with them. I was as an outsider....It was very difficult to live with my father, because his new wife hated me and did not want me to live with them. I always was blamed, everything I had done was bad....My stepmother swore, used bad words and hit me....When I told my father about what she did, he did not believe me, sometimes he hit me instead. My father does not love me anymore, but loves his new wife, I think.... Then I moved to live with my mother wishing for better life. However, it was also terrible. My stepfather often tried to harass and rape me many times but did not succeed. I told my mother about what happened but she did not believe me, and she loves her new husband very much. When I tried to explain and talked about his behavior, she got angry, hit me and asked me go away. She did not love me, but she loves their new children....I used to stay with my uncle. He also harassed me and tried to rape me several times. Even though these things happened, I had to stay with him, because I had no place to stay and I think that my parents do not want me. I do not know why I have to face this miserable life. I have no place to go and need money to feed myself to live” (Case 1, 22 years old)

### ***4.3.3 Friend induced***

Five respondents said that they entered into the sex industry due to misguidance of friends. The respondents reported a few situations concerning a friend's influence to work as service workers. "My friend asked and induced me to work with her, and I also did not know what to do with my life" "My friend was not being true with me (not clear about the work)." "My friend asked me to work with that and she said I would get a lot of money" as the following states:

"My friend persuaded me to work in a textile or garment factory but after arriving in Vientiane capital we could not work at the garment factory as we had expected because the end date of recruiting was over, and it would be only opened again the next month. I could not stay waiting for a month and I wanted to go back home, but I had no money for a bus ticket and had to sleep at the bus station for a night....Then, my friend suggested work as a service woman in a small beer shop and she said we also could get a lot of easy money.... I agreed to work with her".

"I decided to leave my home and move to Vientiane capital wishing that I would get a good job there. I worked at a garment factory a few months. Working at the garment factory was very work hard; I had no time to rest and conditions are very crowded with thousands of people working there. The work starts from 7 am to 10 pm every day without the weekend, off and I got just a little money. I could not feed myself well. Then I tried to look for the better job that could get higher pay...One of my close friends who used to work at the garment factory, was working as a service woman at the beer shop and she came to visit me at the factory. She persuaded me to go work with her if I wanted to get more money. I needed money so I decided to work with her." (Case-1, 22 years old)

“When I was 17 years old. One of my old girl friend told me his name and gave his telephone number to me . She also told me that I could get US\$450\$ for only one time having sex and sleeping with him. I was thinking about it for almost one week and then called him and took a bus from the village about 60 km a way to meet him at a hotel in Vientiane capital. I was very afraid when I met him because he was about the same age as my father. I cried and told him I was not willing to do it and want to go home. He said OK and gave me US\$10 for the transportation. Unfortunately, when I came back home, my mother was very sick with no money to take her for treatment at the hospital. So I called him again and decided to sleep with him. He paid me US\$450. I was very surprised to see such an amount of money. I had never seen even US\$25. I gave some money to my parents but not all. Atthe same time because I was afraid they would know about what bad thing I had done” (Case 4, 19 years old)

“Because my parents were separated and there was nobody to generate family income and there were many problems, I needed money to support my family. I did not know where to go and my friend asked me to work for serving beer with her at the small beer shop. But the nature of work is not only serving beer. If I wanted to have lot of money I had to go out with clients for providing sexual service exchange the money”. (Case 3, age is 18 years old)

#### **4.3.4 Broker/agents**

Three respondents stated that a broker came to their home village and induced them with a high pay job including comfortable living. The agents convinced them to work with them by giving a picture of plentiful money and beautiful clothes without explaining the hard nature of the work. Women were deceived by being informed that the job was a table server in the restaurant.

#### **4.4 Economic Status and Future Expectation of Service Women**

The majority of respondents have worked as service women at least one year. Three respondents have worked for about six months. Most respondents said that being a service woman is not easy, because they have to meet and provide service with different kinds of clients every day. Moreover, they have to perform as expected of service women. The service woman needs to speak softly and do whatever to comply with the clients' satisfaction. The service woman should be docile, talkative, and active. The service women should know how to take care of, and not reject the client's wants. This means that the service woman needs to do all the things that clients like. Moreover, the service woman should have good health, because she has to drink beer or alcohol or smoke with the client every day. If she cannot satisfy clients, she would not have any clients. If she has no clients, it means she would not earn any money. In addition, if she is rejected or not chosen by clients several times, the pimp or shop owner may not allow her to continue working at the shop. Therefore, all the service women know that they come to work just for money; they do all the things for money even it is against their wills as following shows:

“I have no salary, but get a percentage of US\$.20 per bottle of beer. This means that I have to encourage customers to drink more, and I have to drink more and more too. I have to take care of and provide sexual service to clients every day. The average number sexual clients is about 12 to 14 customers per week. It is great that I can get easy, good money, average income of about US\$50 to US\$60 per week. This means that I receive about US\$120 to US\$200 per month, but I also have to provide sexual service to about 35 to 40 clients per month”.  
(Case 8, 16 years old)

“I came to work here for the first time with my friend who has worked as a service woman for several years. She showed and taught me how to act and pretend that would be attractive to clients such as how to sit,

“speak softly using present behavior, how to take care of clients and how to negotiate with a client”. (Case-1, age of 22 years old)

“I tried to leave this job several times, but when I arrived home there was only particularly small house, equipment for house (such as television, radio, microwave, etc.) and food to eat. One of my friends said that since I did. I already, I had nothing to lose, so I should continue to work until I get a lot of money. When I visited my village, I was afraid to walk around the village. I stayed only at home. However, people know that I did this bad and dirty job. One of the villagers asked me at the bus stop why I did, you are not stupid why did you do it, it is for very a bad girl.” (Case-4, age 19 years old)

#### **4.4.1 Economic Status of Service Women**

Most of the respondent’s families are farmers and hunter, gathers working in the rice fields and forestry in rural areas of the provinces. Though, the respondents had difficulties in reporting family income, some of them explained the economical status of the family like this “I think my parents had no money because sometime we had no food to eat and all of the children and including the parents wore very old clothes.”

Incomes earned by service women and non-service women are very different. Even though, service women do the job that society does not accept, they can get a lot of money about four to five times more than a woman who works at a garment textile or industrial factory. In Lao PDR, government officials get a salary of about US\$20 to US\$50 per month. By contrast, all the service women mentioned that a minimum a woman earns at least US\$20 to US\$30 per week or about US\$100 per month. A service woman said that she gets at least US\$50 per week or US\$200 per month. Another service woman said that she get at least US\$80 per week or US\$350 per month. Besides this, service women also receive other benefits from the clients such as a car, mobile phone, motorcycle, clothes, etc. They all mentioned that service women could get more money than persons who work in other jobs and they stated that their

friends, who had worked as service women could buy cars and build houses for their parents.

However, incomes earned by prostitutes are not reported in the account statistical/official, but for the women involved in prostitution, these incomes do offer a competitive and viable work option to some of the work that is being done in other jobs. Some of the respondents pointed out that they are able to invest their money in various businesses such as a beauty salon, barber shop and clothes store; others are able to feed and cloth their children, pay for brothers and sisters in schools and carry out a number of other livelihood supporting activities in the family. All the respondents mentioned that they had some kind of responsibility and therefore their money was spent to support the family.

#### **4.4.2 Future Expectation of Service Women**

Most respondents said that they really would like to leave from being a service woman as soon as possible. However, before stopping and leaving they would like to save enough money to run a small business such as selling food and open a barbershop. Majority of respondents said that they would like to work in the garment or textile factory, even it is hard work, it would be better than sex work trade. One respondent said that she did not know what to do in the future and she thinks that the most important is having a lot of money for her children and family.

One respondent said: “For the future, I really would like to avoid working this job, but I cannot now because I would like to have some money for supporting my family, running a small business such as selling food, barber-shop etc, and particularly I need money for my child finish school. I am also finding out a new job that would be able to get good pay and no violence”. (Case-6 age of 20 years old)

“Talking about a plan for future, I do not know where to go and what to do, because I lack education to find employment. Even though this job is

bad, dirty and unacceptable in society, but I can get easy and good pay. So that I think, it is fine for me. However, if I have to stop and change my job, I would like to change this job to work at a garment factory”.  
(Case-8 age is 16 years old)

## **4.5 Drug Use and Alcohol Consumption**

### **4.5.1 Drug Use**

According to the findings, most respondents have been taking the contraceptive pill every month. In addition, the study found that six respondents were forced to take drugs for increasing sexual desire before having sex with clients particularly Chinese and Vietnamese men. They did not know what kind of drug was given to them. After taking the drug, most of them said that they felt very tired, had no energy, got drunk, lose control of themselves and did not want to eat anything, but they desired sex and enjoyed sexual intercourse and could have sex during the whole night.

One respondent said: “A client forced me to take a drug before having sex; he said that “I will be happy and have enjoyment”. I did not know what kind of drug he gave me. I rejected taking it and he was used violence, because he liked doing that. After taking it, it made me feel pleasure sexual, desire and become active with sexual practices. However, the day after I could not walk very well and got very tired.  
(Case-5, age of 25 years old)

### **4.5.2 Alcohol Consumption**

Alcohol use is also linked with sexual violence. Alcohol use makes service women more vulnerable to sexual violence and rape because it affects communication and judgment, making it more difficult to detect signals from people and from the environment. This affects both the victim and the perpetrator of rape. The research found that most of the service women in the study have to drink at least five bottles of

beer with clients every day. They could not refuse to drink alcohol with clients because it is their “duty” to serve alcohol and drink with clients. Some of them said that they drank a lot of beer in a day. They got drunk, close control of themselves and slept on the table. The respondents said that they have no salary, it is the way to earn the money, and if they could drink more bottles of beer, it means that they would get a lot of money, because they got a percentage of the money per bottle. Some of them said that one day they drank with a client and had to finish more than fifteen bottles of beer. This finding indicated that service women who reported drinking heavily were more likely to report physical and sexual violence by their clients than those who did not.

However, drinking beer is not good for health. Most said that after drinking beer, the next day they were very tired, could not do anything and only sleep. They also emphasized that, as a result of drinking too much beer, they got a big tummy, got fat and became overweight with no energy, and a headache, got weak and yellow skin.

One respondent said: “Drinking beer, serving and having conversation with clients is my main duty for being service woman. What I do not like is a lot of drinking but I have to take care of them because I need money from them. Usually I drink heavily and I get drunk every day. One time I got drunk and slept on the table at the small beer shop. I did not know what the client did while I was drunk. The day after, I felt tired, had no energy. I sometimes feel sleepy but cannot go to sleep earlier because I have to take care of and drink beer with clients.”

Another respondent said: “I have no salary, but get a percentage of US\$ .20 per bottle of beer. This means that I have to encourage customers to drink as much as possible, however, I also has to drink the same as them too, or otherwise they would not drink. They might say that if they would like to drink alone why not drink at home. They come here because they want service women taking care of, serving and drinking with them” (Case-7 age is 17 years old)

## 4.6 Social Relationships between Service Women and the Others

### 4.6.1 Relation with Pimp or Mama-san

The relationships between service women and pimps can be seen as a power relationship in the sex industry. The service woman is attributed to be the weak person while the pimp/mama-san is recognized to be the strong one in terms of the structure of class domination between employer and employee. Therefore, the pimp/mama-san has power and authority to control the service women, which in turn creates a superior/subordinate status over them. Moreover, findings show that the pimp/mama-san hold the permission of service women's parents those who were sold by parents or relatives. Service women realized that the pimps/mama-sans had already paid their parents so they had great authority to control them. Besides, service women dependencies toward their pimps/mama-sans can be seen as well through service women's accommodation. Most service women stayed in the same house with their pimp/mama. Through these mechanisms, administrative and accommodation dependencies, service women are put in subordinate positions under pimps/mama-san's control. Therefore, service women definitely have low bargaining power over their own body as the following shows:

“Pimp/madam-san is not good, he/she has forced me to go out with clients, and if a client comes back to the shop and tells that I do not provide good services; the pimp would use vulgar words and violence such as hitting or slapping me, or throwing me out of the shop.”

“Pimp/madam-san is not good because he/she usually cuts down the tips that clients give me and if I ask, they would be angry with me. He/She had forced me to go out with a client (such as Chinese and Vietnamese client, who always use sexual violence toward us), who I really do not like and do not want to go out with them.”

The majority of the respondents said that the pimp/mama-san treats them badly. He/She usually speaks vulgarly to them. They all emphasized that they were forced to go out with clients that were selected by the pimp, even if they had known that they were not good clients. If they refused to go out, they would be abused badly, the pimp hitting and slapping them. Some respondents said that the pimp/mama-san usually cuts down their tips given by their clients. If they asked for all their tips, the employers would be angry with them. Moreover, three respondents said that they were forced to have sex or raped by the pimp at the shop. The pimp/mama-san did not protect them from any violence, but also used violence toward them.

One respondent said: “The first day of entering the beer shop when I was only 14 years old, I came there to follow my friend to work as a waitress but I was forced by the pimp to give my virginity to a client and received only US\$50. I could not do anything and had to obey him. At that time, the pimp forced me to provide sexual service for clients every day at least once. Even now the pimp still forces me to choose a client he selects. If I do not obey, the pimp uses bad language or asks me to get out from the shop. I don’t know where to go” (case 3, 17 years old)

One respondent said: “Talking about forms of sexual violence, I faced this several times, forms of violence such as: the **pimp harassed and raped me**—while his wife (mama-san) was going out for business and I was sleeping alone in the room. Suddenly, he came into my room, locked the door and raped me. I tried to against his bad behavior, but he hit and slapped me. I wonder why that day there was no one in the shop. I could not tell anybody, otherwise he would expel me from the shop. **Forced to have oral sex and sex with plastic penis**—I also faced this several times by a construction worker. He works for a full day in the sun and dust at a building and does not take a bath, how dirty he was. The construction worker usually comes to their shop after he just received this salary or at the end of each month. **Forced to**

**provide free sex**—the pimp often forces me to provide free sex for extra clients such those in the big position and police. The “Pimp explained to me that because commercial sex is illegal, our business would be closed if they did not get any benefit from us” (C-8 age is 16 years old)

#### **4.6.2 Relationships with Other Service Women**

The majority of respondents have close friends working as service women at the same shop. They discuss problems, how to protect themselves from diseases and violence from clients, but some of coworkers are bad, they do not tell the truth and are competitive in finding a client. However, they all said that they never have talked with other service women at other shop even if the shop is nearby to their shop. A girl said that she has never talked with her friend who also comes from the same village, but she works at a different shop, even though the shop is very nearby.

One respondent said: “I never communicate with others service women from different small beer shops, even though I also have one of my villagers, who comes from the same village as me. She works at the next small beer shop, but we are competitors with for clients each other. I feel sometimes jealous of them because I think they are trying to take my clients.”

#### **4.6.3 Relationships with Clients**

Power relationships between service women and clients are obvious in this study. Under the patriarchy and capitalist mechanism, the clients who pay the money for sex have authorities in women’s body. Service women cannot refuse the clients. They have to take all the clients because they need their jobs and money.

During the providing of sexual acts, some clients refuse condom use and do not pay attention to the service women’s feelings. They expected to have fulfilled whatever they

want. They may want special sex practice from service women such as anal sex, oral sex, penile decorations, rough or sadist sex. Many male clients still (despite HIV/AIDS) do not want to use condoms. Sexual violence against sex workers can occur when the sex worker insists on safe sex, but the client refuses. Most service women have to compromise in these instances as they do not want to lose customers, otherwise the clients may demand their money back or the clients may beat them. Thus, they have to tolerate being abused by clients. These examples highlight the very subservient role of the powerless of service women.

Most respondents said that they do not like the clients because the majority of clients are bad; the clients usually look down on them, speak bad and dirty words, and use the violence toward them. Some said that they feel very bored in what they are doing as they need to take care of and go out every day with clients who they do not know. Others mentioned that they are very afraid to go out at night with the strange man whom they do not know, but they have to go because they need the money. For those who have more experiences working as service woman for many years they often say that it matter because this is just their job and they have faced it every day. Some also mentioned that it is good if the clients come to use their service every day because they would get a lot of money. Furthermore, most of respondents said that they did not look for a client, but all of the clients came to the shop by themselves.

However, some clients good, because they are friendly, and helpful when a service woman needs help, particularly regular partners or boyfriends (some as identified by). The regular partner is identified “*boyfriend*” (for young man) and “*Fan Pa*” (for old man). This group of men usually come to the shop and choose only the same girl for going out with them. They have given the service women for help such as seeking health care, going shopping and some had bought the mobile phone for the service women. Two said that they have boyfriends, even if their boyfriends have wives. They said that their boyfriends usually come to the shop whenever, daytime and nighttime. The boyfriends take care of them and help them in everything, particularly money.

Nevertheless, some emphasized that there were many clients' wives who came to the shop asking their husbands to return home. Some wives quarrel with the service women when they see them sitting beside their husbands, talking or going out with them. Their wives will make phone calls to the shop to find their husbands.

A respondent reported: "I worked almost two years as a service woman. It might be because of I came to work here by myself, so no one forced me not even pimp; I also have freedom to choose or not choose a client. I provide service only regular clients, particularly my fan-pa (old man). He usually visits, calls and has a date with me to go out for dinner, shopping etc. He also bought me a mobile phone...." (Case 4, age is 19 years old)

#### **4.6.4 Relations with Police Officers**

The research found that most respondents were forced to provide free sex for men in high positions and go out with clients whom they did not like. The majority of respondents said that they do not like police officers because they usually blame them for doing the wrong and bad thing. Moreover, they use the power of their position to control and ask them to do all the things they want for satisfaction such as having sex with out payment. They usually threaten them if they do not follow their orders as they would be arrested and fined. Furthermore, they usually use bad words to be rude and blames them that they are very a bad and dirty girl.

Two service women mentioned that they have boyfriends who are police officers. They usually help them such as protecting them from the violence of clients and pimps. They also give the information about STI and HIV/AIDS and recommends to them to wear the condom with all clients.

One respondent stated: "I do not like police officers because they usually use power to control me to do against things my will such as force me to have sex without payment...they usually come to the shop

and ask about our personal stories, identity card and all of the documents, and where we come from... They also use vulgar words in front of the clients and many people.”

## **4.7 Sexuality of Service Women**

### **4.7.1 Sexual Meaning of Service Women**

Most respondents stated that all service women have sex with clients not for love but for money or materials gained from sex. They emphasized that they all would not like to have sex with strangers every day, but they have to do it as it is their duty to provide sexual pleasure and satisfy clients. They do not care who the clients are, what they do and how good or bad the clients are. One who is involved in the sex industry means that she has sold her body. They mentioned that they are the women who provide sexual pleasure in exchange for money and fulfill the clients' needs.

One respondent explained: “Why my life is like this, it is likely because I have such bad luck, living in 18<sup>th</sup> level of hell. I never taught that I would be like this a service woman, who is selling her own body. In terms of my experience as service women, I have faced many things both bad and good. The “good” means that I can get more money than before and can send some to my family. The “bad” means facing violence, discrimination and stigmatization from the society, because people did not accept us and particularly look down and blame service woman as dirty and bad that harms society”. (C-3, age is 18 years old)

### **4.7.2 Sexual Behavior of Service Women**

In this study, sexual behavior of service women refers to three parts 1) The first time of sexual intercourse, 2) frequency of sexual partners, and 3) condom use.

#### ***4.7.2.1 The First Time of Sexual Intercourse***

Most respondents had first sex with their boyfriends and husband when they were very young. Two of them said that their friends had suggested them to sell their virginity when they were 14 and 17 years old. One respondent argued that, in fact, she really did not want to sell her virginity when she was only 14 years old. It was happened because her friend did not tell her the real nature of work at the small beer shop. She just arrived at the small beer shop one day and the pimp forced her to provide sexual service for a client and he paid her only US\$50. She was very upset to do that. One respondent explained the reason why she sold her virginity: When she was only 17 years old, she had sex with a Lao man who had just come from the USA. Actually, she really did not want to do that, but she had to because her family was very poor and her mother was very sick at the same time. She did not have any money to take her parent to the hospital for treatment. She did not know how to get the money. Consequently, a friend suggested to her to sell her virginity for the one time payment of US\$450. She thought about it for about a week and decided to do it. .

Three respondents were forced to get married when they were 13 years old (one girl) 16 years old (one girl) and 18 years old (one girl). Respectively, the average age of having the first sex was 15.4 years old. The youngest age of having first sex was 12 years old with her boyfriend and oldest one was 18 years old with a boyfriend and husband. Generally, they were at the young age when they have first sex. They felt good and happy if they had sex with boyfriends gave their virginity and for someone they loved.

***Table 5: the First time of Sexual Intercourse***

| <b><i>The First Time of Sexual Intercourse</i></b> |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| <b><i>Age</i></b>                                  | <b><i>No. of Respondents</i></b> |
| 12   | 1                                |
| 13   | 2                                |
| 14   | 1                                |
| 15   | 3                                |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 16  | 3         |
| 17  | 1         |
| 18  | 4         |
| <i>Average age of first sex:</i> 15.4<br><i>years</i> | Total: 15 |

One respondent said: “The first time of sex was selling my virginity when I was 17 years with Lao man who had just came from USA. How I know him? One of my friends saw me that I had just become young and very beautiful girl. She suggested him and gave me the his telephone number that I would receive about US\$450 payment only my first time with sex. I was thinking for almost one week long in deciding. I called him and took a bus from my village about 60 km away to meet him at a hotel in Vientiane capital. I was very afraid when I met him because he was about 45 years old the same age of my father. I cried and told him; sorry I would not do and would go home. He said OK if I would not want to do and gave me US\$10 for the transportation to go back home. Unfortunately, when I came back home, my mother was very sick and there was no money to take her for treatment at the hospital. So I called him again and decided to have sex with him. He paid me US\$450. I was very surprised to see such lot of money belonged to me. Before that, I only saw US\$25. I gave the money to my parents but not all at the same time because I was afraid they would know about the bad behavior of mine. I found a way for me to be involved in commercial sex” (Case-4, age 19 years old)

#### ***4.7.2.2 Frequency of Sexual Intercourse***

The majority of the respondents said that it is a common issue to have sex with clients every day. There are several types of clients such as ordinary man, police officers, businessman (including Chinese, Thai and Lao), taxi and truck drivers, construction workers (including Vietnamese, Chinese and Lao). The clients come to

the shop by themselves. Some of them were regular clients. They might call and make a date for going out.

The majority of the respondents stated that they could not calculate how many times they have sex per week because they do it a lot of time and there is fluctuation in their business every week. On an average, three service women said that they have sex with clients around 5 to 10 times per week. Other two service women said that they have around 12 to 14 times per week. One service woman said that she has sex with clients and boyfriend at least 20 times per week. Furthermore, one respondent had sex with clients and her boyfriend more than 40 times per week because she had at least four to five clients every day. For example, one respondent reported:

“I knew this job is bad and dirty; the society does not accept it and people always rude and I really did not like that but I have to do it as it is only way I can get a lot of easy money. My job as service woman is full of hardship and difficulty. I have to take care of men and provide all kinds of service particularly sexual service until a client is satisfied. I have to provide sexual service every day; the average of providing sexual service is at least 8 to 10 times to clients per week”. (Case-5, age of 25 years old)

#### ***4.7.2.3 Condom Use***

Most respondents said that they always use a condom with all clients. They would make an agreement of using a condom with clients before leaving the shop. If the clients refused to use it, they would deny going out with the clients. However, some respondents said that sometimes, when they arrived at the bedroom of the hotel or guesthouse the clients particularly Chinese and Vietnamese men refused to use the condom. Then they tried to convince them to use it, but the clients would use violence or might not pay them.

The majority of the respondents know about STI and HIV/AIDS. They have heard some stories from their friends about the risk of STI infection, such as gonorrhoea. However, they do not understand the level of risks they can face. They also know that condoms are used to prevent STI and pregnancy. They would use condoms with all partners. If there is no condom used, they would refuse to have sex with them. The service women, especially the newcomers, could accept for not wearing a condom if they are paid more from the clients. High paying clients are considered risky. In addition, two respondents did not use condoms during the first time of sex in selling their virginity to clients. However, they all consider that it is normal to carry condoms with them all the time.

Although, all the respondents said that they always use a condom with all clients, they did not use it when having sex with their boyfriends. Most service women said that they have never asked their boyfriends to wear condoms with them because of trust and love. Two service women said that they have never used condoms when having sex with their boyfriends who have wives.

### **4.7.3 Social Representation of Service Women**

#### ***4.7.3.1 Self-esteem of Service Women***

Most of the respondents said that they did not like this kind of work as service women, but they have to do it in order to earn money for supporting their families and themselves. They also consider this kind of job as very bad job and they feel that they are living in hell or underworld. They all feel that they are bad persons in term of social value toward women.

One respondent emphasized that she really hates it if someone calls her a Karee (name a service woman). She feels very sorry and hates herself. Most respondents feel lonely and have not any power or rights for protecting themselves to be free from violence. However, they had to learn and observe from older or senior service women to take control over their lives.

One respondent emphasized that she liked this job because it is an easy way to earn a lot of money. She said that she would earn more money and stop it someday in the future. She was very tired and felt that people and society did not accept her. One respondent said that she really hated this work, but she had to do it because she needed the money. She emphasized that even if she really did not like a client, but she had to have sex with him. She said that she did not think about herself. She had no idea for her future life. She just would like to earn money to help her mother and family.

“I did not tell anyone particularly my family and everybody else about this. If I told them, they would look down, and use bad or dirty word in speaking to me. I know that people and society do not accept this kind of job; also this job negatively harms our society and culture. I would like to find a new job, but I have less education. However, I have to work here because it is easy to get a lot of money”. (Case-1, age of 22 years old)

Another respondent mentioned that she did not like this job, but she needed the money to feed her child and herself. She said it is very tiring and boring to meet strangers and provide them with sexual service every day.

#### **4.7.3.2 Family Attitudes**

The majority of the respondents said that they did not tell anyone in their families particularly parents, because they do not want people to look down their family. If their parents know, they would be a shamed of and angry at them. They might not accept them as their daughters. Most respondents said that people around them seem to discriminate, and look down on them because they do a bad job and nobody accepts them but hates them. However, there were two respondents who said that they were sent or sold by their parents to work as service women because this kind of work can make a lot of money for their family. Moreover, one respondent said that she was forced by her uncle to work as a service woman. Her uncle told her that if she did not do this kind of job, she would have no place to stay and nobody would serve

her food. Her parents were divorced and both of them stayed with new partners. One respondent said that she stayed with her grandmother and she knew that she worked as a service woman, but she did not say anything to her. The respondents stated:

“My parents do not know about my work as a service woman, they think that I work as a server at the restaurant and some of them think that I work as a garment factory worker.”

“My parents do not know what kind of work I am doing and they think that I am not a service woman because I also bring my child to work with me here.”

“My parents know that I work as a service woman because the shop owner (pimp) went to pick me up from them at my village, and I think they were already informed about my work”.

“My grandmother knows about my work as a service woman, but she accepts me. Because she understands that I am old enough to choose or design my own life and have to earn money to feed myself. If I did not do this job whose would help me and give me money.”

#### **4.7.3.3 Social Representation to Service Women**

On the cultural contextual aspect contributing to sexual violence against service women in Lao, sexual violence against service women is rooted in a culture of social discrimination against service, which legitimizes and sexualizes the violent appropriation of service women's bodies for individual gratification. Interestingly, although service women are considered to be victims as *'bad women'*, they are also viewed as wanton (liberated sexual beings), debauched (making valueless money from sex) and morally weak. The whore stigma emphasizes the *'evil influence'* of such *'base'* women on the *'good'* moral character of society, deeming them deviant; women who have transgressed the norms of *"acceptable"* social behaviour. Most

respondents said that they did not like this kind of work as service women, but they have to do it in order to earn the money for supporting their families and themselves. They also consider this kind of job as very a “*bad job*” because who ever work as service women feels that they are “*staying in the hell or under the world*”. They all feel that they are “*bad girls*” in term of social expectations. People around them discriminate, are rude, look down on and use bad or dirty words to them, because they do the bad job and nobody accepts them. They feel that people have said they are “*destroying and burning*” the cultural norms and society. They feel that they are “*behind and under society*”. Moreover, most respondents emphasized that, in general speaking, there are gender inequalities between men and women; people discriminate and do not support women to participate freely in any social activities in the family and communities, but for service women, they are double discriminated against because they are women and they are bad persons.

People look down on and identify service women as bad and dirty within the society. This social stigma leads them to keep quiet or manage to survive by themselves. According to the findings most respondents who faced violence, especially sexual violence, kept the evidence quiet and did not go seeking any help including from health care provider. They think that nobody will believe them or feel that they deserve to be raped, or see it largely as a part of their job. Some respondents spoke up and asked for help from a pimp and police, but they found that no help happened from them. Instead, pimps were angry at them because they thought that service women didn't work hard or did not obey. According to Lopez-Jones (1999) in discussing societal attitudes towards prostitution and the response of the police to sexual attacks on women who work on the streets: “women and children who try to survive through prostitution are. . .criminalized and accused of ‘attracting’ violence. In this way, the victim, rather than the attacker, is blamed for the violence she suffers. . .When sex workers report violence the police often dismiss the attack as ‘part of the job,’ accuse the woman of ‘asking for it’ or even threaten her with arrest” (pp. 17–18). Respondents reported:

“I never tell them that I am a service woman, because I do not want them to be rude and use bad or dirty language in speaking to me.”

“The reason that I became a service woman because I was faced with these problems such as a broken family, poverty and hunger, and I needed to have money to survive myself, feed and afford my child’s schooling and also supporting family. However, I really do not like this job, but I have no chance for the other and I lack of education. I knew that this job is bad, dirty and society does not accept it and no one would like to be this, but how can I get job and meet a good one for social expectation. I did not tell anyone, even my parents about this job because they would blame and look down me as bad, dirty or in a negative way. My parents think that I work as a garment factory worker.” (Case-6 age of 20 years old)

“I am afraid that they gossip about my life in the bad way behind my back. When I visit my hometown in the rural area, I am shy to walk around the village; I only stay at home for a few days. However, people know that I work at this job.”

“Because we have a low level of education, we therefore do a bad and dirty job, in which people and society does not accept us. The ordinary women have higher education, so they do good jobs and society respects them.”

## **4.8 Sexual Violence**

### **4.8.1 Meaning of Sexual Violence**

Based on the definition for this study, the sexual violence against service women is *“unwanted sex or have sex against their will”*. Most respondents said that even though they work as service women and provide sex services for anyone who pays

them, sexual acts should be in usual ways like the ones other people do. The style of sexual acts should be in limited forms and not the extra styles such as anal sex, oral sex, using a plastic penis, using small ball inside the penis, upside-down acts etc.

“I usually close my eyes during sex with clients because I did not want to see their faces and I am afraid and fearful. You know several times I did not finish my sexual need.”

“I really do not want to go out with a drug addicted person, because they usually act violent at the time of having sex and they are very grimy.”

“I do not like the foreign clients particularly Chinese and Vietnamese men. They usually insert their hands and fingers into my sexual organ.”

#### **4.8.2 Facing Sexual Violence**

The findings suggest that partner or client violence is a common occurrence among service women. Findings show that the majority of respondents were sexually violated. Twelve respondents out of sixteen have faced sexual violence since they were living at home and working as service women. Four respondents have not had experience in any kind of violence while working as service women. A reason for not being violated is that they were newcomers—just one or two weeks in the workplace. There are two respondents who stated that they were harassed and raped by a stepfather, father’s brother and male relatives. The respondents also emphasized that they have experienced both physical and sexual violence by clients particularly Chinese and Vietnamese men as “*sadist*”. Two respondents said that they were forced to have sex several times and were raped by pimps. Another two respondents were raped by a group of gangsters of four men at one time. Moreover, they also mentioned about ‘*no condom use*’ and ‘*refuse to have sex*’, was related to sexual or physical violence by clients.

I propose two possible explanations for this discrepancy. First, sexual violence by clients may occur more frequently because the clients perceive that they are entitled to sexually exploit women who are involved in the sex trade. Moreover, service women may tolerate sexual abuse by these men because they view it as *'part of the job'*. This is especially true for those who are powerless or whose primary source of income is from prostitution. A second explanation for the disparity in the reported prevalence of recent sexual violence may be related to the women's tendency not to label, recognize, and define sexual coercion and rape in an intimate relationship as abuse and, consequently, such violence is underreported. Service women who had an intimate partner reported fewer episodes of sexual and physical abuse by clients. I speculate that the service woman's intimate partner may protect her from exploitation by clients, or he may be a police officer or her pimp.

“Talking about the life as service woman, it is full of hardship and difficulty to earn money by selling one's body as a service...indescribable. There are hundreds of kinds of clients. Nevertheless, every day, I have to take care of and provide sexual service until a client is satisfied. I faced several times and many forms of both physical and sexual violence such as: **forced to have sex without a condom beings used**- Why do a majority of clients particular Chinese and Vietnamese men not like to wear condom? Even when I explain they would be vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and STD infection, they do not care. I inflected with woman's diseases and STD; but seriously, if I refused the clients I would be abused by violence and would get nothing”. (Case-6 age of 20 years old)

#### 4.8.3 Forms of Sexual Violence

Sexual violence covers both physical and psychological attacks directed at a service women's sexual characteristics; the findings show that there are several forms of sexual violence that would be unwanted by service women and against their will. However, most respondents reported that they faced at least two or three times in their

lives. The findings show the following forms of sexual violence against their will, as follow:

#### ***4.8.3.1 Forcing to do certain types of sexual acts that they do not want to***

They all mentioned that in fact they really did not want to have sex with everybody, except their boyfriends or husbands. They pretended to accept this job; it does not mean they liked it. They have done the job because of money, especially for a client who asked or forced them to do all forms of the sexual activities for him. They also emphasized that they agreed going out or sleeping with him to fulfill his sexual desire and get money from him. It did not mean that they do not have clients or no one would like or enjoy sexual acts with them. Actually, they go out about three or more times with clients per day and almost every day.

There are several forms of sexual violence in this categories including anal and oral sex, use of sex toys, forced taking a drug, inserting fingers, sadist, inserting small balls in his penis and long hours and more numbers of sexual acts.

***Anal sex or anal intercourse*** is a commonly practiced form of human sexual behaviour in some cultures. It involves the anus and possibly the rectum, especially, but not limited to, the insertion of the erect penis into the rectum through the anus. ***Oral sex*** can be very pleasurable and it is often used as the principal form of sexual expression or as part of foreplay. Not only are the sexual organs sensitive and well supplied with nerve endings, the same is true of the mouth, tongue and lips, so the pleasures of oral sex are not limited to the person on the receiving end. When oral sex is given to males while the woman is on her knees, some men report a feeling of superiority and domination, which contributes to the pleasure of the acts. The findings show that the majority of respondents usually have experienced sexual violence from foreign clients, particularly Chinese and Vietnamese men. They have been forced to have “*oral and anal sex*” that is against their will. They all also emphasized that most clients would like girls to do all sexual actions for them.

“The majority of clients are stubborn and serious guys. They always ask me to have oral sex, anal sex and do all things that satisfy them.”

“Talking about my experience of sexual violence as service woman, I was forced to have oral sex, putting plastic penis, taking a drag for making sexual desire increasing often goes together by Chinese and Vietnamese (construction workers). I wonder that these groups of clients had likely plan such “first” forcing to take a drag, “second” putting plastic and electric penis, “third” oral sex and “finally” take long and do more times of intercourse that did not let me to take rest; he did a whole night”. C-1, age of 22 years old

*A sex toy* is any object or device that is primarily used in facilitating human sexual pleasure. Sex toys do not include contraceptives, pornography, or condoms. A related term is marital aid, often used as a euphemism for sex toys, although marital aid is broader as it can also be applied to drugs and herbs marketed as supposedly enhancing or prolonging sex. Sex machines are mechanical devices used to simulate penetrative intercourse, usually, but not always, requiring electric or gas power to function. The findings show that there are two respondents who faced clients requiring them to be abused by a plastic and electric penis that were very hurtful and painful.

*A Drugs* were another vulnerable factor contributing violence against service women. Many times, a drug was given by the clients who wanted the service women provide harsh sex, and sadist sex. It is likely they experienced double force from the clients to meet the men’s need. The findings show that there are three service women who ever forced to take a drug before having sex. If they refused to take it, the clients would beat, slap and rape them. One respondent emphasized that she did not know what kind of drug the client forced her to take it but after taking it she enjoys sexual activities very much, but she got very tired the day after having sex. She was very tired and did not want to eat anything.

“Sometime I went out with clients who are drug addicts. They forced me to take drug before having sex. He also called two or three friends to come over and they raped me in the bedroom.”

***Inserting fingers***—most of respondents said that all clients would use their fingers to put into their sexual organs. Some of clients had long nails, which could tear a sexual organ.

***Sadism*** is a person who gets pleasure from hurting another person; include the deriving of sexual gratification or the tendency to derive sexual gratification from inflicting pain or emotional abuse on others. The findings show that some respondent said that they have faced a sadist man; he usually hits, beats, slaps, pushes and say bad and dirty words before having sex. They emphasized that he said nothing before, but he violated them after arriving in the room.

“The clients, such as sadist particularly Chinese and Vietnamese men, usually used violence to beat and slap before having sex. And sometime, they raped me in a group of three to four guys”

***Inserting small balls in his penis***—this occurs if a man feels that, his penis is not big enough; some men wish they had a larger penis even though it is still a taboo subject in our Lao society. The findings indicate that if a woman is unsatisfied with the size of her client’s (partner) penis, yet she would deny it if asked directly. One service woman said that she had faced a client who had put a small ball into his penis, which made her feel very much pain.

***Long hours and more numbers of sexual acts***—two service women said that they had been forced by the clients to do very heavy and long sex. Three of them have been forced by the clients to have frequent sex without letting them take rests. They said that the clients did sex the whole night, which made them very tired the next day.

“The clients forced me to take a drug before having sex, so that he could enjoy with sexual act for a longer period.”

“The clients forced me to have sex more than three to four times in a night. They said that they had already paid me for the whole night so they would do sex the whole night.”

#### ***4.8.3.2 Rape and gang rape:***

***Rape*** is a violent crime of forcing another person to submit to sex acts, especially sexual intercourse. Rape falls within the broader category of "sexual violence", which this report defines as any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. All service women are potential victims of sexual violence. Rape showed that power is constituted by, develops, and is exercised through the interconnection of sexuality, aggression, violence and masculinity. It is clear that rape must not be understood as a sexual act, but as an act of domination over women. The fear of rape, and consequently the fear inspired by men in general, structures service women's lives, resulting in increased physical and psychological vulnerability and a diminished capacity for self-affirmation and participation in society. Rape is perhaps the most efficient form of social exclusion. According to the findings show that there are three respondents who were forced and raped by the pimp at the shop. One respondent mentioned that the pimp raped her when his wife went out. The other one said that she was forced and raped by the pimp when she came there during the first day.

According to the American Bar Association (2003), “***Article 112***” rape, i.e. sexual intercourse using physical power and threats or profiting from the helpless condition of the victim, shall be punished by imprisonment of 3 to 7 years. Rape accompanied by threats of murdering or causing grave physical injuries, or repeated perpetration of rape, shall be punished by imprisonment of 5 to 10 years. Rape committed by an especially dangerous recidivist or accompanied by especially grave

injuries, as well as rape of a child girl, shall be punished by imprisonment of 8 to 15 years and exile of 2 to 5 years with or without exile, or the death penalty.

In Laos the penal code “*Article 120*”—on the rape of children, states that the punishment for having sexual relations with a male or female child below the age of 15 is imprisonment for between 1 to 5 years.

*Gang rape* is sexual violence in which several persons force the victim to have sex at the same time. According to the American Bar Association (2003), “*Article 112*”—Rape committed by group or rape of an adolescent girl, shall be punished by imprisonment of 5 to 15 years.

The findings show that there are two respondents who faced gang rape of two to three persons at the same time. One emphasized that one client came to the shop alone and gave her the higher price (80\$) for going out with him, but when she arrived at the room, there were two to three men who were waiting there.

“I was raped by a gang (three guys); one guy came to the shop and paid me for high price (US\$80), and I went out with him to the hotel and met three guys who were waiting in the room. I could not retreat, so they raped me without payment, and including that they stole my little money and mobile.”

#### ***4.8.3.3 The use of Oil (Champathong to enlarge their penis during sex act with the service women):***

One respondent said that some clients take vaccine with oil that could make their penis very big. As a result, this big penis tore her sexual organ. The “Champathong” is a name of kind of oil that is used for hairstyling. Some groups of younger generation males in Laos use this kind of oil to inject into their penises in order to make them bigger and longer. This can be a cause of sexual violence against service women.

## 4.9 Consequences from Sexual Violence

It is important to recognize that the survivors of sexual violence should be separated into two categories such as physical and emotional problem.

### 4.9.1 *Physical Problem*

For the victim of sexual violence, the immediate physical impact may or may not include physical injury, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Sexual violence also occasionally results in physical injury. This study shows data of physical and genital injury sustained by victims of sexual assault, and that some women experienced being hit and bleeding.

#### ➤ *Pain sexual organ:*

They all mentioned that whenever they had greater frequency of sexual practicing or activity (for example, one respondent had sex 40 times per week), they **“felt great pain”** in their sexual organs, waists and under their stomachs. Most of the respondents reported that putting fingers and materials such as plastic and electric penis, small ball into the penis, and having anal sex could make experience **“great pain”** and **“tear”** in their sexual organ.

One respondent emphasized that she had to go to the hospital because the client used an electric penis. It made her **“sexual organ tear greatly and blood came out nonstop”**. She had to sleep at the hospital for a week and could not work for more than a month. They all mentioned that they hope that they would not face this again.

One respondent mentioned that having oral sex is very dirty which makes her **“vomiting immediately”**. If she refused to do it, she would be abused by the clients.

Many of the respondents said that they were forced to take a drug to increase sexual desire and activity, but after taking the drug, they emphasized that they cost

control of themselves, some said that they enjoyed and desired sex during that time but that would make them very tired the next day.

➤ ***Got pregnant and STI***

The findings show that the clients refuse not to use condom makes a service woman vulnerable to sexual violence, STI, HIV/AIDS and pregnancy. Otherwise, many of respondents (including other service women who are not the target group) got ***“STIS and pregnant”***. Getting STI and pregnant without a husband stigmatizes a ***“bad girl” and “trash”*** of the society. If a girl got pregnant, her only option is that she has to get abortion. However, abortion is illegal in Laos.

**4.9.2 Emotional Problem**

The ***long-term*** emotional impact can be experienced in many ways including disturbed sleep, frequent nightmares, flashbacks to the attack, embarrassment, shame, eroded self-esteem, depression, anxiety, hostility, anger, loss of sexual confidence, feelings of isolation and perhaps guilt or self-blame.

➤ ***Low Self-esteem or Depression***

The finding indicates that all service women enter the sex industry mainly for economic reasons. They feel ***“low self-esteem or depression”***, because, they feel “forced” to choose a profession that is highly stigmatized and not regarded positively by society due to poverty and lack of educational background. This can result in high levels of ***“stress”***. They suffer from high levels of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

➤ ***Emotional Shutdown***

A general emotional shutdown protects the survivor from experiencing immense amounts of psychological pain. For some survivors, this might mean dis-associative

experiences, where they experience a split between the body and the mind. Others may have amnesia and be unable to recall specifics of the abuse, or even entire periods of their life.

➤ ***Sadness and Loss***

Survivors experience a deep sense of “*sadness and loss*”. For survivors of childhood abuse, there is a loss of innocence and trust. Survivors of adult sexual assault often grieve over the loss of their safety, their intimate relationships, and their sense of self. Feelings of shame and guilt are nearly universal for survivors of sexual violence. Survivors feel that they are somehow responsible for the violence.

➤ ***Ashamed of Themselves and Feel Dirty***

The findings show that they all may be “*ashamed of themselves and feel dirty*”, tainted, or unworthy of love. A pimp said that some of the service women “*keep quiet*”, stayed alone after going out with a client. “She sometimes drank beer alone, cried and smiled; no one knows what she was thinking about.” However, many of them came back and discussed what and how they were going to do, particularly to protect the newcomer from violence and diseases.

#### **4.10 Help Seeking Behavior**

One respondent had asked for help from police officers but nothing happened, even that she also had to give service fee. Several respondents were hit and were bleeding; they did not go to the hospital because they felt that people there did not accept them as they do a bad job so that bad things should be happened with them.

When getting STI infection they seek help by asking the information from their friends who had experienced it before. Most respondents go to the drug store and buy the medicine for self-treatment. Some would keep quiet alone, as they were afraid people or friends would know that they were infected and they would lose their

clients. On the other hand, because they are discriminated and stigmatized from the society, they could not access the health care service, as the following respondents state:

“Sometimes when I get STI infection, I did nothing; no one helps me and I do not know where I can go for treatment.”

“What are the health consequences of what I do? I suffer great pain and it was enough to tear my vagina or sexual organ, if I was abused with a plastic penis. I inflected with women’s diseases or STD. however, I treat the disease herself by buying drugs from pharmacy. I usually wear condom and takes drugs to protect diseases and pregnancy.”(C-8 age is 16 years old)

“No one helps me and I do not know where I can ask for help. I do not want someone to know about my sickness because they would blame me....If I told the pimp/madam that I was raped by three persons, he/she could not do anything”

“I’ve never talked to anybody because I am afraid they would know the event and blame me as a bad girl....however, I do not know where I should go for help....And I am afraid they would blame me that I do the bad and dirty job...”

“I used to ask for help from the police officers when I was violated, but they could not help me and could not find the perpetrator. They gave me no suggestion.”

#### **4.11 How to Cope with Sexual Violence**

The majority of respondents mentioned that they really want to stop this problem because it frequently happens to them but they do not know why it happens. During

the field interview, the respondents cited the following question: What is the better way to approach, where could they go seeking for help and who could they talk with? However, some of them mentioned that they “*should know how to take care of the clients*” in a better way such as “*speaking softly and polite words*”. This would prevent or reduce violence, because the men need the service women to take care of and please them did not refuse them.

Additionally, one service woman also emphasized that they should take care of and “*follows*” clients will in all the things that would “*make them satisfied*”.

Most respondents said that they have to “*learn how to negotiate*” with clients from friends, senior workers who have experience as a service woman for a long time. They have to observe friends, practice by themselves, and learn from their experiences. They all mentioned that if they did not like a client or when they feel he was likely expressing bad attitudes to them, they would refuse to go out with him. But they should say the soft and polite words, such as “*today I am sick or I have my period time, so it is not convenient for me to go out with you, and then say please come here again next time and next time I will go.*” Some mentioned that if even she has to go out with him, she needs to know how to take care of him. For example, do not use impolite words, but use soft and polite words, which may be reduce violence, because mostly men like a service woman who takes care of them; and sometime a man who comes looking for a service woman may have some problem in his family and he wants a girl who understands and cares for him.

Others mentioned that they have to “*choose only the hotel or guesthouse nearest*” to their shop or one that they know well. Therefore, it is very important that every service woman has to learn and know how to take care of the clients in order to prevent and stop any forms of violence, particularly sexual violence against them.

“I think we need to know how to take care of them such as use the soft and polite word, which may reduce violence, because the men need the girl to take care of them but not control them.”

“How I avoid violence. If I do not like him or feel that this man is not good, which may vulnerable to me, I would say, “Today I am not available to go out with you, because I am sick. Sorry, next day you come again, I will go with”. If he comes again the next day and I could not refuse, then I would choose a hotel or guesthouse nearest the shop or I know well....”(C-8 age is 16 years old)

The primary way prostitutes learn how to avoid violence is through experience. This means that they must first be subjected to abuse. Experience actually improves the odds of avoiding violence. Prostitutes are reluctant to report the abuse because of the low probability that legal action will be taken. Furthermore, upon getting out of jail, assailants tend to become more violent. A prostitute's vulnerability to violence is augmented by the fact that many of them are under the influence of drugs.

Service women must also be able to cope with a high number of sexual encounters. In order to perform their job, it is essential they avoid becoming emotionally involved with clients. Perhaps the most important factor is the creation of boundaries between their trade and personal life:

- To maintain integrity and preserve herself, a prostitute must maintain clear boundaries. She cannot allow anything that has personal meaning...The prostitute thus creates a split between the ‘private’ and the ‘public’ self.
- This suggests that identifying exclusively as a prostitute is problematic for women. Thus, they need to establish boundaries between their personal life and career choice. Furthermore, sexual encounters are job-related and are not personally satisfying. A word frequently used to describe the customer and the transaction is "trick." The word implies that prostitutes fool customers into believing that the sexual encounter is a product of her personal desire.

#### **4.12 Contextual Factors Related to Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence against service women in Lao PDR is a multidimensional problem. Findings from this study show that there are multiple factors contributing to sexual violence against service women, which include *social context, cultural context, situational context condition of working condition and situational of sex industry (including child prostitute and trafficking) in the Lao PDR.*

##### **4.12.1 Social Context of Laos**

The social context contributing to sexual violence against service women refers to the patriarchal society in Laos. In a patriarchal social structure, power, control, and gender role stereotypes that actively devalue females are the fundamental causes of sexual violence against service women. The nature of patriarchy can be traced through the cultural ideology of male dominance in Lao society. The ideology of male dominance is internalized in social life through the family and religious teaching that define women as followers while men are leaders. Fathers and husbands are acknowledged as possessing power of control over daughters and/ or wives. Women are the property of either their fathers or their husbands. The finding showed that in the families of origin, some of the service women were physically abused by fathers, stepfathers or husbands. Some of them were forced to work in the sex industry. Some were forced to marry and were forced to have sex by fathers, stepfathers or male relatives. One respondent said that she could not stay with her mother, because the stepfather and his relatives were used to harass and rape her several times. Another one said that violence was used against them several times by her husband, when he got drunk.

Male power in the household is shown clearly in terms of social relations between husband and wife, father and daughter. This male power cannot be independent without the support of social institutions. Although, male power is a kind of “*symbol*” or nonverbal behavior, its influence is very important in human

relationships. Power inequality is centered in the lowest institution such as the family to the highest institution such as state institutions.

In terms of the sexes, males are higher than females; structurally adult men or fathers are on top; with mothers or women following in the lowest position. Thus, service women are assigned to the lowest position, suffering from double oppression. *Firstly*, due to that they are women, they endure oppression from the patriarchal system; and *secondly*, as service women they are structurally recognized as the bad women. That is why many service women face sexual violence. Because of limited and even have no freedom over their bodies, service women become the subject of physical, emotional and sexual violence.

#### **4.12.2 Cultural Context of Laos**

Cultural context refers to gender roles and stigmatization of service women. Gender role is a crucial part in forcing women to become service women. According to Lao society, a daughter has the major responsibility for taking care of and supporting the family. The women and girls are expected to help their mother to take care of the siblings and the household chores. The underlying issue is that the service women feel they have an obligation to support their families and they have to fulfill the expectation of their family (this feeling is either real or perceived). Findings show that some of respondents entered the sex industry by themselves. The reasons were that they wanted to support and save their family from poverty and hunger. One service woman said she decided to sell her body because she needed the money for mother's illness treatment.

Findings indicated that most service women came from a poor family in the rural areas. In addition, they faced many problems in the family such as a broken family (parent and self-divorce), harder-ship and hunger in the family. Therefore, poverty might play the crucial role in pushing girls and women to find opportunities for employment and search for a better life. They then end up in the hands of pimps with

promises to provide a good job and a better life. They thus, have to work as bonded labour in the entertainment and sex industry.

The findings show obviously that all of the respondents entered work as sex workers because of the poverty and hardship in their family. All the service women interviewed in this study indicated that they entered the sex industry for economic reasons, and to a certain extent felt trapped by their lack of education and inability to secure other employment. Education is a good indicator showing the economic status and opportunity in a women's life. Most service women in the study had low education, the majority could not finish primary school, only four completed primary school, but could not go beyond the first year of high school and one had no education. All said their families could not support them to study or want them to work. Then, a pimp would take advantage by luring them with sweet promises of bright future lives but in fact, pimps would use women for their own benefit. Lacking education leads them to have no chance to do a better job, brings them to have low status and low bargaining power and less rights over their bodies. Because of lack of personal resources, they thus, will be accompanied by more vulnerability in facing some unwelcome conduct, in particularly, sexual violence against them.

The relationships between service women and pimps can be seen as a power relationship in the sex industry. The service woman is attributed to be the weak persons while the pimp/mama-san is recognized as the strong one in terms of the structure of class domination between employer and employee. Because the pimp/mama-san has power and authority to control the service women, this in turn creates a subordinated status over them. Moreover, findings show that the pimp/mama-san hold the permission of the service women's parents, for those who were sold by parents or relatives. Service women realize that the pimps/mama-san has already paid their parent so the pimps have great authority to control them. Besides, service women dependencies toward their pimps/mamas can be seen as well through service women's living accommodation. Most service women stayed in the same house with their pimp/mama-san. Through these mechanisms, administrative and accommodation dependencies, it put service women in subordinate position under the

pimps/mama-san's control. Therefore, service women definitely have low bargaining power over their own body.

Power relationships between service women and clients are obvious in this study. Findings found most respondents were forced to provide free sex for persons of high position and go out with clients whom they did not like. Under patriarchy and capitalist mechanisms, the clients who pay the money for sex have authority over women's body. Service women could not refuse the clients. They have to take all the clients because they need jobs and money.

While providing sexual acts, some clients refuse condom use and do not pay attention to the service women's feelings. The service women expected to fulfil whatever the clients want. They may need to comply with sex demands such as anal sex, oral sex, penile decorations, harsh sex or sadism sex. Many male clients still do not want to use condoms. Sexual violence against sex workers may occur when the sex worker insists on safe sex. Most of the service women have to compromise in these instances as they do not want to lose customers; often the clients may demand money back or the clients may beat them. They have to tolerate being abused by clients. These examples highlight the very subservient role and the powerlessness of service women.

On the cultural contextual aspect in contributing to sexual violence against service women in Lao, sexual violence against service women is rooted in a culture of social discrimination against service, which legitimizes and sexualizes the violent appropriation of service women's bodies for individual gratification. Interestingly, although service women are considered to be victims '*bad women*', they are also viewed as wanton (liberated sexual beings), debauched (making valueless money from sex) and morally weak. The whore stigma emphasizes the '*evil influence*' of such '*base*' women on the '*good*' moral character of society, deeming them deviant; women who have transgressed the norms of "*acceptable*" social behaviour. Most respondents said that they did not like this kind of work as service women, but they have to do it in order to earn money for supporting their families and themselves. They also consider this kind of job is very "*bad job*" because working as service women

they feel that they are “*staying in the hell or under the world*”. They all feel that they are “*bad women*” in terms of social expectations. People around them discriminate, are rude, look down and use bad or dirty words to them, because they do bad job and nobody accepts them. They feel that people say they are “*destroying and burning*” the cultural norm and society. They feel that they are “*behind and under society*”. Moreover, most respondents emphasized that, in general, there are gender inequalities between men women, they suffer discrimination and are not supporting women to participate freely in any social activities in the family and communities. But for service women, they are doubly discriminated against because they are women and they are bad persons.

People look down on and identify service women as bad and dirty service women within the society. This social stigma leads them to keep quiet or manage to survive by themselves. According to the findings most respondents who faced violence particularly sexual violence, kept the evidence quiet and did not go seeking for any help including from health care providers. They think that nobody will believe them or that people feel that they deserve to be raped, or see it largely as a part of their job. Some respondents told a bout the violence and asked for help from the pimp and police, but found that nothing happened from them. Instead, pimps were angry with them because they thought that service women did not work hard enough or did not obey. According to Lopez-Jones (1999) in discussing societal attitudes towards prostitution and the response of the police to sexual attacks on women who work on the streets: “women and children who try to survive through prostitution are. . .criminalized and accused of ‘attracting’ violence. In this way, the victim, rather than the attacker, is blamed for the violence she suffers. . .When sex workers report violence the police often dismiss the attack as ‘part of the job,’ accuse the woman of ‘asking for it’ or even threaten her with arrest” (pp. 17–18).

Such attitudes toward service women, particularly the occurrence of sexual violence against service women are internalized into service women’s attitudes. The findings show that most respondents indicated the incidence of sexual violence as part of their job. It is unavoidable. Some of them may blame themselves that they did not

do a good job, did not please the clients well. This may suggest that service women in the patriarchal society have been socialized to feel that they are a sexual object and have to meet men's sexual needs, while men have the right to oppress and coerce women in order to satisfy their own fantasies through service women.

#### **4.12.3 Situational Context of Working Condition**

Situational context of workplace refers to risk in the lifestyle of being a service woman. The prevalence of recent *physical and sexual* violence is commonly occurring among service women. Thus, we can propose two possible explanations for this discrepancy.

*First*, sexual violence by clients may occur more frequently because the clients perceive that they are entitled to sexually exploit women who trade sex. Moreover, service women may tolerate sexual abuse by these men because they view it as '*part of the job*', which includes drinking with clients, going out with stranger and providing sexual service, going to place they don't know. This is especially true for those who are homeless or whose primary source of income is prostitution.

The findings show that they all are exposed to alcohol and drugs which may decrease the ability of service women to resist or defense themselves from violence. Drinking with clients is regarded as the duty of service women because it is the way to please the clients. Moreover, service women have to encourage clients to drink as much as possible in order to get a percentage from selling drinks (US\$.20) to earn money for living. The research found that most service women in the study have to drink at least five bottles of beer with clients every day. The service women also emphasized that they could not refuse to drink with clients, because this is their duty. Some said that she had drunk lot of beer in a day, she got drunk, could not control her self, she slept on the table. Drug was another vulnerable factor contributing violence against service women. Many times, drug was given by the clients who wanted them to provide harsh sex, and sadist sex. It is likely they had experiences of doubling force from of the clients in order to meet the men's need.

The fact that they have to go out with any and all clients in order to provide sex may place service women at the risk of violence perpetuated by abusive clients. Findings show that service women reported violence as likely to occur at the unknown places. One respondent reported experiencing gang rape when she went out with one client but few men were waiting for her in the room.

*A second*, explanation for the disparity in the reported prevalence of recent sexual abuse may be related to the service women's tendency not to label, recognise, and define sexual coercion and rape in an intimate relationship as abuse and, consequently, such abuse is underreported. The findings show that of those who have experienced any violence particularly sexual violence, most *'did not search for any help'*. Being afraid of not being helped in any public institution because of their condition as service women does not seem to be the reason for not searching for help. It is more likely that help is not searched for because the service women do not know *"where"* to search for help. Most of the sample interviewed said that they did not know where to seek for help with regard to violence. One respondent reported that she would not go to the police to solicit help for the crime committed against her because she was working in the illegal and forbidden places, so the police think she deserved to face it. It is clear that there is a strong public sense that service women are criminals and do not deserve the same rights that other citizens enjoy. One of them had asked for help from a police officer and a pimp, but there is nothing happened, even that she also had to pay deposits for their servicing.

As service women have to survive without any help from others, it seems that service women have to have self-management and a self help group in order to cope with violence in their daily life. The most common strategy is to avoid conflict situations with the clients. The findings indicated that service woman have learnt how to take good care of the clients and how to negotiate with clients. They have learnt techniques from friends, senior women who have long experience as service women. In addition, they might observe from friends and learn by having experiences directly. Service women may help each other by warning about dangerous clients who are

known to be abusive, those who refuse to pay, and those who will abandon them when leaving the premises of the small beer shop.

#### **4.12.4 Situational of Sex Industry in the Lao PDR**

Likes other countries, the situational processing of the sex industry in the Lao PDR is obviously a social problem. Although, prostitution and the sex trade are strictly forbidden and illegal in Laos, the situation of sex industry includes child prostitution and trafficking. Just only a few years there were many small beer shops that provide a sexual service in the back occurring in throughout the whole country of Laos. There are also several articles of the penal code declaring to prevent the setting up of the sex trade such as in *Article 123* which punishes with imprisonment arranging from 6 months to 3 years anyone who obtains an income by producing persons for prostitution. If the person who is produced for prostitution is below 18 years old or is under the offender's responsibility and is forced to be prostituted the punishment is imprisonment ranging from 3 to 5 years.

This study found that pimps took away two service women from their village. The pimp asked for permission from their parents to take them to work as service women. Service women mentioned that due to the poverty, hunger and hardship of their family their parents forced them to work in such places. One service woman was engaged by a relative to work with his friend in a small beer shop. There are five young service women who entered into the sex industry due to the misguidance of friends. They reported several situations concerning a friend's influence to work as service workers. "My friend asked and induced me to work with her, and I also did not know what to do with my life" "My friend was not being true with me (not clear about work)." "My friend asked me to work with that she said I would get lot of money"

Moreover, the findings indicate that a broker, who came to their home village, took away three respondents. The broker induced them with a high pay job including comfortable living. These agents convinced them to work with them by giving a picture of plentiful money and beautiful clothes without explaining the hard nature of

the work. Women were deceived by being informed that the job was as server in the restaurant.

The findings indicate that all service women were very young, the majority are less than 20 years old, a few over 20 and the average age is 18.6 years old. Considering that girls enter into the sex industry at very young age, they would have less power to negotiate, and have vulnerability to be abused in many ways. As one service woman from this study reported *“the first day of encountering the beer shop when I was only 14 years old, I was forced to sell my virginity because the pimp forced me to provide sexual service for a client and I got only in money US\$50. I could not do anything, even going out from the room. I did not know what to do, so I just have to follow him. The pimp forced me to provide sex every day at least once per day without a chance to choose the clients by myself.”*

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Conclusions

Based on the finding of this study showed that the majority of respondents were used violence in general and sexual violence in specific. This situation was happened because sexual violence is a personal, sensitive and complexity issue so that is a hidden problem and they are not aware speaking out of it, which is not easy to collect information about that from respondents.

The main focus of this study is to elaborate the magnitude and the contextual factors contributing to sexual violence against service women. Throughout of previous analyses, it was apparently illustrated that service women had faced several kinds of difficulty from family and society such as, poverty or hunger, hardship, broken family, forcing to involve into sex industry and commercial sexual exploitation, violation both physical and emotional, as well as sexual violence. The family, community, social and structural norms tend to play a very important role in placing service women into weak position and difficult situation compared to others.

The sample of this study consisted of 16 service women aged between 16-22 years. Majority of them are less than 20 years. The average age of service women in this study is 18.6 years old. Most of the respondents migrated from the rural areas. Most respondents have only basic educations. Most had not even finished primary school.

This study found that there are several reasons for a woman to become a service woman such as being forced by parents and relatives, an escape from a broken family, and an inducement from agent/stranger or friends. Pimps took two respondents from their village. One respondent was forced to work in sex industry by male relatives.

The study found that a drugs and alcohol use makes service women more vulnerable to sexual violence and rape because it affects communication and judgment, making it more difficult to detect signals from people and from the environment. The findings show that many service women were forced to take a drug for increasing sexual desire before having sex. They all have to drink at least five bottles of beer with clients every day. They could not refuse to drink alcohol with clients because it is their “duty” to serve alcohol and drink with clients. They also get money from selling in percent per bottle of beer.

The relationships between service women and pimps can be seen as a power relationship in the sex industry. The service woman is attributed to be the weak person while the pimp/mama-san is recognized to be the strong one in term of the structure of class domination between employer and employee. Therefore, the pimp/mama-san has power and authority to control the service women, which in turn creates a superior/subordinate status over them.

The majority of respondents have close friends working as service women at the same shop. They discuss problems, how to protect themselves from diseases and violence from clients, but some of coworkers are bad, they do not tell the truth and are competitive in finding a client. However, they never have talked with other service women at other shop even if the shop is nearby to their shop.

Power relationships between service women and clients are obvious in this study. Under the patriarchy and capitalist mechanism, the clients who pay the money for sex have authorities in women’s body. Service women cannot refuse the clients. They have to take all the clients because they need their jobs and money. During the providing of sexual acts, some clients refuse condom use and do not pay attention to the service women’s feelings. They expected to have fulfilled whatever they want. They may want special sex practice from service women such as anal sex, oral sex, penile decorations, rough or sadist sex. Sexual violence against service women can occur when the service women insists on safe sex, but the client refuses.

All service women have sex with clients not for love but for money or materials gained from sex. They would not like to have sex with strangers every day, but they have to do it, it is their '*duty*' to provide sexual pleasure and satisfy clients.

The average age of service women having the first sex was 15.4 years old. However, it is a common issue for service women to have sex with clients every day. The majority of the respondents could not calculate how many times they have sex per week because they do it a lot of time and there is fluctuation in their business every week. On an average, they have sex with clients around 12 to 14 times per week. Furthermore, one respondent had sex with clients more than 40 times per week because she had at least four to five clients every day.

Most respondents always use a condom with all clients. They would make an agreement of using a condom with clients before leaving the shop. However, some respondents sometimes refused to use the condom from clients. They did not use it when having sex with their boyfriends. Then they tried to convince them to use it, but the clients would use violence or might not pay them.

On the cultural contextual views service women are considered to be victims as '*bad women*', They also consider this kind of job as very a "*bad job*" because who ever work as service women feels that they are "*staying in the hell or under the world*". They all feel that they are "*bad girls*" in term of social expectations. People around them discriminate, are rude, look down on and use bad or dirty words to them, because they do the bad job and nobody accepts them. They feel that people have said they are "*destroying and burning*" the cultural norms and society. Moreover, most respondents emphasized that, in general speaking, there are gender inequalities between men and women; people discriminate and do not support women to participate freely in any social activities in the family and communities, but for service women, they are '*double discriminated*' against because they are women and they are bad persons.

People look down on and identify service women as bad and dirty within the society. This social stigma leads them to keep quiet or manage to survive by themselves. They all feel lonely and have not any power or rights for protecting themselves to be free from violence. According to the findings most respondents who faced violence, especially sexual violence, kept the evidence quiet and did not go seeking any help including from health care provider. They think that nobody will believe them or feel that they deserve to be raped, or see it largely as a part of their job.

The findings suggest that partner or client violence is a common occurrence among service women. The majority of respondents were sexually violated. Twelve respondents out of sixteen have faced sexual violence. They have experienced both physical and sexual violence by clients particularly Chinese and Vietnamese men as “*sadist*”. Two respondents were forced to have sex several times and were raped by pimps. Another two respondents were raped by a group of gangsters of four men at one time. Moreover, they also mentioned about ‘*no condom use*’ and ‘*refuse to have sex*’, was related to sexual or physical violence by clients.

Sexual violence covers both physical and psychological attacks directed at a service women’s sexual characteristics; the findings show that there are several forms of sexual violence that would be unwanted by service women and against their will. However, most respondents reported that they faced at least two or three times in their lives. The findings show the following forms of sexual violence against their will such as ***forcing to do certain types of sexual acts that they do not want to put*** (including anal and oral sex, use of sex toys, forced taking a drug, inserting fingers, sadist, inserting small balls in his penis and long hours and more numbers of sexual acts); ***rape and gang rape***; and ***the use of Oil (Champhong to enlarge their penis during sex act with the service women)***.

It is important to recognize that the survivors of sexual violence should be separated into two categories such as physical and emotional problem. For the victim of sexual violence, the immediate ‘***physical impact***’ may or may not include physical

injury (pain sexual organ), unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Sexual violence also occasionally results in physical injury. This study shows data of physical and genital injury sustained by victims of sexual assault, and that some women experienced being hit and bleeding. The long-term *emotional impact* can be experienced in many ways including low self-esteem or depression, emotional Shutdown, sadness and loss, ashamed of themselves and feel dirty and keep quiet.

Most respondent mentioned that they should know how to take care of the clients in a better way, speaking softly and polite words, learn how to negotiate and choose only the hotel or guesthouse nearest. This would prevent or reduce violence, because the men need the service women to take care of and please them did not refuse them.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

An effective response to the sexual violence against service women requires coordinated and consistent efforts at every level by following of short-term and long-term plan:

### **5.2.1 Short-term:**

- In order to prevent violence and reduce its prevalence among service women, it is also essential that prevention efforts include education for these service women about their heightened risk of client violence and strategies on how they might increase their safety. Efforts should include skills training such as problem solving, coping, and help-seeking. Service women need to be provided with alternative coping mechanisms and safety planning for risky situations. For example: set up the project that assist service women in identifying potentially dangerous people, situations and places, then exchange and disseminate information among them.
  
- Moreover, prevention efforts should consider how to make an impact at the community level. Service women can often work together with

agencies to warn other service women against soliciting previously violent clients. Building community social norms against violence may help reduce the occurrence of physical or sexual violence against them. Client (partner) violence prevention efforts should also be extended to all community-based and outreach programmes, including counseling centers, hotline services, casualty treatment centres in hospitals, homeless shelters and soup kitchens.

### **5.2.2 Long-term:**

- A National Plan of Action for combating the sex industry should be established, in order to prevent and control the violence in general and sexual violence in particular. Such a plan should involve relevant line ministries, mass organizations, international organization and NGOS. In connection with the National Plan of Action, there should be a review of the legal situation to see whether some laws need to be adjusted to better protect women and girls from involvement in sex industry and to decriminalize women and girls as victims.
- Information campaigns should be organized in order to raise awareness among risk groups on what can happen to them if they are offered a job away from their village. This is particularly necessary in rural areas, where there is a high rate of girls being lured into becoming service women. Those engaged into the sex industry sector should also be given information about the risk of alcohol and drug abuse, sexual diseases and violence including physical, emotional and sexual violence in the workplace. As part of the information campaign, peer-group could be organized for the major group in the villages, because the findings show that many of the respondents were introduced and induced by a friend to get involved in the sex industry.
- Sexual violence against service women is not merely caused by women's personal resources. The poverty of the family, low education,

limited knowledge and improper information about the sex industry and personal dependencies are results of the patriarchal and capitalist system. Gender inequality has developed and settled in societies leading to mistreatment over service women. This major ideology was reinforced at the individual, family, society and state levels. It is necessary to build an integrated approach involving community network, legal system, government policies, religious elements, NGOs and other community-based groups to implement gender equality and women's empowerment.

### **5.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

- This topic requires further investigations in order to develop a clear understanding; it should be studied on a large-scale and should include methodological improvements such as triangulating data drawn from both quantitative and qualitative research approach.
- This study focus on service women's experiences of sexual violence, conducted only two districts of Vientiane capital. Future research should be conducted in other areas in Laos, as the country is composed of various groups with significant socio-cultural diversity. Furthermore, the findings from this study might be different from other areas.
- This study finds out the social, cultural and situational contextual factors related to sexual violence that takes place against service women that operates to perpetuate sexual violence against service women. For future research other related factors such as legal, political, etc.
- For future research there also should be study an in-depth about the judgment that the roles of service women to perpetuate sexual violence.

- For future research also should study on how the role of health professionals in Laos society to help service women from their suffering caused by sexual violence.
  
- Explore the possibility to find alternative social support for service women such as peer education and counseling centers, etc.

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## **APPENDIX**

## Interview Outline for Service Women

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

I am a student from Mahidol University and she is my research assistants, we also live in Vientiane and come here in order to learn from you, asking and hearing your experience regarding to your work at entertainment places. I conduct research here just solely related to my thesis or educational purposes. Could you please share with us about your experience to be service women. Friendly speaking, the real information from you is very important to disclose the nature of the problem in which can be basic data remain the government and any projects of NGOS and concern dealing with the issue of service women. I consider very much to your confidentiality that is why this research far away from government politic matters, taxation and political party. Frankly, I will not to disclose your personal identity, changing into anonymous of pseudo name, therefore no one will know about your privacy matters.

### **I. Socio-geography character of service women**

1. What can I call you?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your race/ethnicity?
4. Are your parents still alive, where do they do for living?
5. How many sister brothers (siblings) do you have?
6. How is the economical status of your family? ( please describe)
7. How were you doing when you were a child or young? (please describe about history life)
8. Where do you live now?
9. How long do you live there?
10. Who else lives there with you?

11. How do you go to work?

**1.1 Service women's resource:**

1. How old were you when you entered into service women?
2. What is the highest level of your education?
3. Where are you from? (please describe you history of migrant to now)
4. Do you speak minority or Lao official language?
5. Could read or write Lao language?
6. How do you communicate with others?
7. One who is closely with you knows about you as a service woman?

**1.2 Social and cultural contexts of service women:**

1. What do you like of your work as service women? (please describe)
2. Do you tell anyone that you are service women?
3. Do you think what are the different between service women and general women in society from you view? (please describe)
4. What do you think that other women can do, but service women cannot?
5. What do you think that you are hidden in society?

**II. Experience as a service woman**

*I would like to share with you some experience about your sex industry*

1. Could you please share with me how many years have you been working as a service woman?
2. Could you please share with me what year did you start this work? (When did you start working as a sex worker?)
3. Could you please share with me how you enter into a service woman? (please describe)
4. Could you please share with me the reasons why you enter into a service woman? (please describe)
5. Could you please share with me how do you get your customers?
6. Do you have any performance or regular partners?

7. Could you please share with me how many clients do you have in average per day/week and month?
8. Could you please share with me how much money do you earn per client, week, and month?
9. Could you please share with me what is the hardest thing you as a service woman?
10. Could you please share with me what is most rewarding you as a service woman?
11. Could you please share with me how long do you think that you will stay in as a service woman?
12. Do you think that you are able to quit the job, if you want to stop or change to others job?
13. Do you try to look for other types of work? What type of work would you will be?
14. Could you please share with me if you do not want to sleep with a client or do something to serve his pleasure, do you think that you can refuse, why? And how do you negotiate?
15. Do you think you are able to choose a client that you like?
16. Could you please share with me how you negotiate to use condom with them?
17. Do you share you any income with someone, with whom and how much per client, day, week, and month?
18. Do you have any closed friends, who work as service women?
19. Could you please share with me how is your relationship with others service women in your work place?
20. What do you think is needed to make your work safer?
21. Could you please share with me have you ever arrested? How many times?
22. How often do polices come to the place where you work?
23. Could you please share with me last time when you were arrested when and where?
24. How long did you stay in jail?

- ***Experiencing sexual violence:***

25. Could you please share with me that you think that you engage in service woman as a result of force, or coercion? By whom and when?
26. Have you been faced any kinds of physical abuse, tell me please what happened?
27. Have you ever been forced to do anything that you did not want to do? Please tell me what types of force and by whom? How frequency?
28. Could you please share with me have you ever forced to have sex without your will? What types of forced and by whom? How frequency?
29. Could you please share with me have you been injured as a result of violence enough to go to hospital? By whom and how frequency?
30. Could you please share with me what did you do when you had health consequences?

### **III. Risk of drug use and alcohol consumption**

1. Could you please share with me do you use drugs?
2. What types of drug that you used?
3. When did you start using it?
4. How often do you use drug?
5. Do you use drug with whom?
6. What are your health consequences when using drugs?
7. How do you feel when you take drugs?
8. Do you drink alcohol?
9. When and how often do you drink?
10. Do you drink alcohol with whom?
11. How many bottles do you drink in a day?
12. What are the health consequences when you drink?
13. How do you feel when you drink?

### **IV. Sexuality of service women**

**5.5 Sexual meaning of service women:**

1. What is your sexual meaning by your view?
2. Do you think why everyone needs to have sex?
3. How do you think of sexual meaning as a service woman?
4. Do you use any kind of method when you are having sex?
5. What type of having sex do you think that is against your will? By whom?
6. How frequency you face?
7. What type of having sex do you think that you unwanted? By whom?
8. How frequency you face?

**5.6 Sexual behavior and sexual partner of service women:**

9. Could you please share with me how different have with clients, performance and regular partner (lover)?
10. How many times a week do you have sex? And do you have sex with whom?
11. What do you think that is important for having sex? (please describe)
12. How do you approach the sexual partner? (please describe)
13. Do you think multiple sexual partners risky to sexual violence? (How? please describe)

**5.7 Sexual representation of service women:**

14. What is your sexual representation from your view? (please describe)
15. How do you think your sexual representation from society view? (please describe)
16. What do you think that not comfortable as being service woman from society view? (please describe)
17. What do you think that service women cannot do? (please describe)

**IV. Social relation of service women****4.1 Relation with Pimps:**

1. How do you think your relation with pimps? (please describe)

2. Do you think they are kind or not? (please describe)
3. What the main work do you do as a service woman? (please describe)
4. How do they provide you the money?
5. What types do you think they force you? (please describe)
6. What type do you think that against your will or do not want to do?
7. How frequency you face?

**4.2 Relation with clients:**

8. How do think of your clients?
9. How do your relations with them? (Please describe)
10. How do you find a client?
11. How many clients do you have in average per day, week and month?
12. How much do they pay for you per time?
13. How do you feel when having sexual intercourse with your clients?
14. What types of sex do you think they force you?
15. Could you please describe unwanted sex or have sex against your will?
16. How frequency you face? (please describe)

**4.3 Relation with police officer:**

17. How do you think of police officer in order to be service woman?
18. Do you think police officer be friendly with service women or not?
19. What do you think that they discriminate service women?
20. Could you please describe what the discrimination that you face?
21. What are the difficulties for your relation with police officer?
22. What do you think they do something against your will?
23. What types do you think that is against your will? (please describe)

**V. Help, Health seeking and how to cope sexual violence**

1. Could you share with me how did you react when you were violated?
2. Where did you go for help or health seeking?
3. Did you go to police when you were violated?
4. How did police solve the problem?

5. Do you think how to prevent or stop sexual violence against you or other service women? (please describe)
6. What else do you think that you want to share with me for help you?

## **BIOGRAPHY**

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
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