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### Introduction: Dignity's Special Issue on the Chab Dai Coalition's Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project

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### Keywords

Cambodia, Butterfly Project, Chab Dai Coalition, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, longitudinal research, victims, survivors, reintegration

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**INTRODUCTION:  
DIGNITY'S SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE CHAB DAI  
COALITION'S BUTTERFLY LONGITUDINAL  
RESEARCH PROJECT**

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**KEYWORDS**

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*DIGNITY: A JOURNAL OF ANALYSIS OF EXPLOITATION AND VIOLENCE* is pleased to partner with the Chab Dai Coalition's Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project to present this special edition on the major findings of the project on the sexual exploitation of individuals in Cambodia. This collection of seven peer-reviewed articles represents a significant body of research, following the lives of 128 Cambodian child and adult survivors of human trafficking, exploitation and abuse over a ten-year period. The articles touch on numerous aspects of the lives of these individuals including the social determinants of health, justice system responses, stigma and the difficulties re-integrating back into their communities. One article is specific to the experiences of the study's male cohort.

While some research from the Butterfly Project has been published, this special edition presents the most current results from the completed project. The body of knowledge created could have important implications for both Cambodia and other countries that deal with significant trafficking/sexual exploitation, as well as for the NGOs that support survivors in after-care shelters and as the survivors re-integrate into their home communities.

It is rare to have the capacity to conduct such a comprehensive body of research on sexual exploitation in any one country and the lack of longitudinal studies on sex trafficked survivors has been noted (Knight et al., 2021). Funding for longitudinal studies on any topic is difficult to obtain. Following the same individuals over time is challenging; problems relocating participants across study waves are common.

This introduction to the special edition presents a brief overview of human sex trafficking worldwide, describing core concepts, policies and interventions to provide context for the studies presented in the special edition. It, then, narrows to global research on sex trafficking, concluding with studies from Southeast Asia and Cambodia. Finally, the articles are briefly described.

## HUMAN SEX TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is a broad term that incorporates sex trafficking, labour trafficking, slavery and organ trafficking (International Labour Organization, 2017). The considerable body of research on this topic is diverse: some focus broadly on human trafficking, while others narrow to a more specific focus on sex trafficking, labour trafficking, or the sexual exploitation of children. There is certainly overlap in the experiences of those who are trafficked such that many are forced into multiple forms, however, each group also has distinct characteristics that make it important to carefully pay attention to the main focus of each publication.

The forced sexual exploitation of adults and commercial sexual exploitation of children is a problem that has existed over the ages but has finally garnered societal attention over the last twenty years, which Russell (2018) links to the proclamation of The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (the Trafficking Protocol) (United Nations General Assembly, 2000), otherwise known as the Palermo Protocol. This was the first international effort to address human trafficking (Bryant & Landman, 2020). It has been updated and tailored for different countries, but the principles remain similar.

Sex trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act . . . in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age” (United Nations General Assembly, 2000). Some prefer terms such as “sexual exploitation” over “sex trafficking” however, debates about definitions and their implications are common and certainly affect how the constructs are measured (Benoit et al., 2019; Nawyn et al., 2013).

While it is difficult to estimate how many individuals are currently sex-trafficked, a recent report by the International Labour organization (2017) proposed that 4.8 million people globally were sexually exploited in the year 2016 alone. These were primarily women and girls (99%), although the sexual exploitation of boys and men may well be under-reported. The majority (70%) of forced sexual exploitation victims were from Asia and the Pacific region (International Labour Organization, 2017).

The physical and sexual violence entailed in being a victim of sexual exploitation results in significantly negative health and mental health consequences that have been well-documented (Kiss et al., 2015a; Oram et al., 2012) and includes PTSD at levels greater than having been sexually abused as a child but not trafficked (Cole et al., 2016). Many of these mental health issues continue into adulthood, primarily affecting intimate relationships and intimacy, resulting in partner violence for many (Puente-Martínez et al., 2019; Thaller & Cimino, 2017). In contrast, some researchers have focused on the resilience of individuals who have been trafficked, highlighting strengths such as positive interpersonal relationships (Knight et al., 2021).

Responses to address sexual exploitation include policies (Hounmenou & O’Grady, 2019) and programs (Dell et al., 2019; Kaufman & Crawford, 2011; Limoncelli, 2016; Macy & Johns, 2011; McCarthy, 2018; Muraya & Fry, 2016), although more research on interventions to address sex trafficking is sorely needed (Knight et al., 2021). Difficulty accessing health resources is a common problem (Price et al., 2019). Awareness campaigns to prevent sex-trafficking are rare, but interesting (Harper et al., 2018; O’Brien, 2016).

## INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ON SEX TRAFFICKING

There is a considerable body of global research with respect to the forced sexual exploitation of adults and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. While this introduction cannot provide an in-depth overview of research world-wide, examples of publications in the developed world include research in the US (Hampton & Lieggi, 2020), Canada (Baird et al., 2020; Sethi, 2007), the United Kingdom (Cockbain & Wortley, 2015), Australia (Davy, 2017) and Europe, including Russia and Poland (Benavente et al., 2021; Hughes, 2014).

Research has been conducted in developing countries and continents such as in Latin and South America (Downe, 2007; Studnicka, 2010; Zhang et al., 2012). Research in Africa includes Lasater et al.'s research in Togo (2019), Adjei and Saewyc's research in sub-Saharan countries (2017) and Azage et al.'s work in Ethiopia (2014).

Given the previously mentioned high prevalence of sex trafficking in Asia and the Pacific regions, the heavy research focus in these areas is understandable. In South Asia, research has been conducted in India (da Silva & Sathiyaseelan, 2019; Parks et al., 2018), in Maritime South East Asia and in the Philippines (Williams et al., 2010; Davis & Miles, 2020).

Numerous researchers have examined sex trafficking in Southeast Asia, studying the phenomenon in Malaysia (Mahalingam & Sidhu, 2020), the Mekong region, which includes Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Vietnam, Myanmar and the Chinese province of Yunnan (Kiss, et al., 2015b; Molland, 2018; Tsai & Dichter, 2019), the country of Thailand specifically (Davis et al., 2017; Davis et al., 2019), Nepal (Basnyat, 2020; Dahal et al., 2015; Kaufman & Crawford, 2011; Ong et al., 2019) and Vietnam (Le, 2017; Davis & Miles, 2018; Glotfelty & Miles, 2018)

Moving to the site of the current special edition, studies centred in Cambodia or a few that included Cambodia in addition to other South East Asian countries examined individuals working in industries that often overlap or hide sexual trafficking such as female masseuses (Miles et al., 2020), male masseuses (Blanch & Miles, 2012), and hostesses in karaoke TV venues (Miles & Alsiyao, 2019). Others examined whether sexually trafficked women could reintegrate into churches (Hester et al., 2020), the legal regulation of women's bodies (Bradley & Szablewska, 2016), and access to health and mental health services by survivors (Aberdein & Zimmerman, 2015); Davis & Miles, 2018).

Several researchers have focused on Cambodian youth (Davis et al., 2021; Gray et al., 2012; Kiss, et al., 2015b; Nodzinski et al., 2020). Blackburn et al. (2010) and Davy (2014) interviewed experts about their perspectives of how best to respond to children who are sex trafficked in Thailand and Cambodia.

Researchers from the Chab Dai collective have previously published articles with respect to the Butterfly Project. Cordisco Tsai, et al. (2020a) examined perspectives of 79 individuals as they moved from the shelter back into the community. Cordisco Tsai et al. (2020b) and Cordisco Tsai et al. (2020c) followed males over time as they transitioned back into the community. Cordisco Tsai et al. (2020d) examined the entire cohort of 128 individual's relationships with aftercare shelter staff over time, while Cordisco Tsai et al. (2021) focused on ten women's relationships with shelter personnel.

In summary, despite the plethora of international research conducted with respect to sexual exploitation and trafficking, it is rare for studies to concentrate on any one country or to attempt longitudinal research examining how individuals fare over

time, after having been provided services to assist their re-integration. The research articles presented in this special edition do just that.

### ***DIGNITY'S SPECIAL EDITION***

This collection of seven peer-reviewed articles presents the most up-to-date research with respect to a range of topics that highlights the breadth of the ten-year project Chab Dai Coalition's Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project.

To set the stage for the subsequent articles in the special edition, Glenn Miles, James Havey, Eliza Piano, Vanntheary Lim, Nhanh Chantha, Sreang Phaly and Sopheara Ou introduce the research project in their article, "I don't want the next generation of children to be in pain like me": The methodology and key findings of the ten-year Chab Dai ten-year Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project on sex trafficking survivors in Cambodia.' This article describes the genesis of the Butterfly Project, the research methodologies used over time and chronicles ten major project findings.

The relative neglect of boys in research on sex trafficking has been noted (i. e. Adjei & Saewyc, 2017). Jarrett Davis, James Havey, Glenn Miles, Vanntheary Lim, and Nhanh Chantha present mixed-method research with respect to the experiences of boys/young men in shelter care and re-integration in "Going it alone": Following the male cohort of participants in the Chab Dai Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project.'

That stigma impacts sex workers globally both when they are working and after they reintegrate is well-accepted (Benoit et al., 2018). Todd Morrison, Vanntheary Lim, Nhanh Chantha, James Havey and Glenn Miles present qualitative research examining how stigma and discrimination affect a cohort of 56 Butterfly Project participants in their paper, "You have to be strong and struggle": Stigmas as determinants of inequality for female survivors of human sexual trafficking in Cambodia.'

"Filial piety" is a concept that is common in Eastern cultures. It refers to family obligations, especially concerning finances. Julia Smith-Brake, Vanntheary Lim and Nhanh Chantha examine filial piety and financial anxiety/security in a cohort of 90 Butterfly Project participants. The article is titled: "Why am I the only one responsible for the whole family?": Expressions of economic filial piety and financial anxiety among female survivors of sex trafficking.'

James Havey, Glenn Miles, Tehillah Eskelund, Lim Vanntheary, Nhanh Chantha, and Hanni Stoklosa next present a quantitative research paper with respect to the social health determinants of Butterfly Project participants, "When they see someone who is poorer than them, they step on that person": The social determinants of health among survivors of sex trafficking in the Chab Dai Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project."

Next, James Havey, John Morrissey, Vanntheary Lim, and Nhanh Chantha offer a qualitative paper examining the experiences of the Butterfly Project cohort in the legal system in Cambodia. Entitled: "I want justice from people who did bad things towards children": Experiences and perceptions of justice for sex trafficking survivors from the Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project." The article chronicles the experiences of a small cohort of study respondents who went to court either as complainants or as witnesses.

Finally, given that few longitudinal studies have followed sex trafficking survivors after they sought assistance to leave (Russell, 2018), it should be no surprise that we know almost nothing about the risks of re-exploitation. The final article, written by Tania DoCarmo, Vanntheary Lim, and Nhanh Chantha, addresses what happens to

female survivors after shelter aftercare intervention. It is entitled: “I don’t know where else to go:’ Pathways to re-exploitation after female trafficking survivors in Cambodia return home.”

To summarize, these articles provide both broad and in-depth information with respect to individuals who have been trafficked in Cambodia, portraying their struggles and successes. Each article includes direct quotes that frame the survivors’ journeys with poignant and often-evocative narratives. In our view, this special edition offers a unique and comprehensive perspective of their lives and the efforts of those who seek to assist them.

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