The Lingha Boys of Siem Reap

A Baseline Study of Sexually-Exploited Young Men in Siem Reap, Cambodia

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Male Sexual Exploitation:
Neglect in Research

- In a review of 166 scholarly articles on the global sex industry, 84% exclusively discussed female sex workers and made no mention of males. (Dennis, 2008)
- Research often views males in the sex industry as liabilities for sexual health, rather than vulnerable human beings that can be damaged.
- Prevalent concept that males are “stronger” and thus more psychologically resilient, able to readily protect themselves, and more easily recover from trauma than adolescent girls.(Frederick, 2010, p. 15)

“Girls are like cloth and boys are like gold.”

Purpose

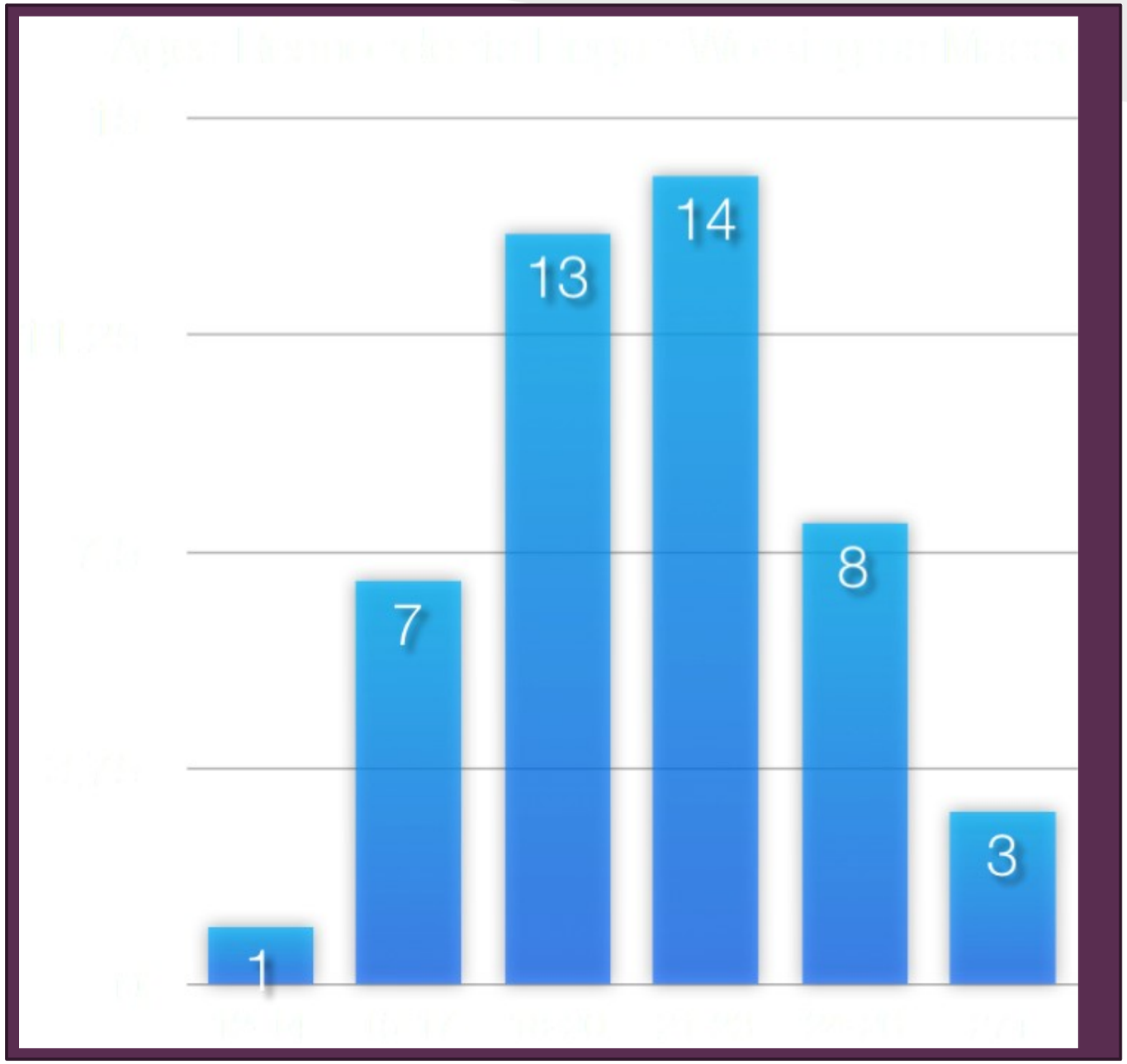
- Provide a baseline of data on sexually exploited young men in Siem Reap, Cambodia
- Uncover potential needs and vulnerabilities
- Provide a basis for understanding, program development, and future research

Methodology:

- Questionnaire-based survey adapted to Cambodian Context from a similar survey developed by Miles & Thakur in Mumbai.
- “Snowball” sampling method, drawing from 21 different massage parlors within a 1km radius of the Siem Reap Town Center:
  - “Male to Male” massage (22 or 44%)
  - “Mixed Gender” massage (28 or 56%)

Demographics:

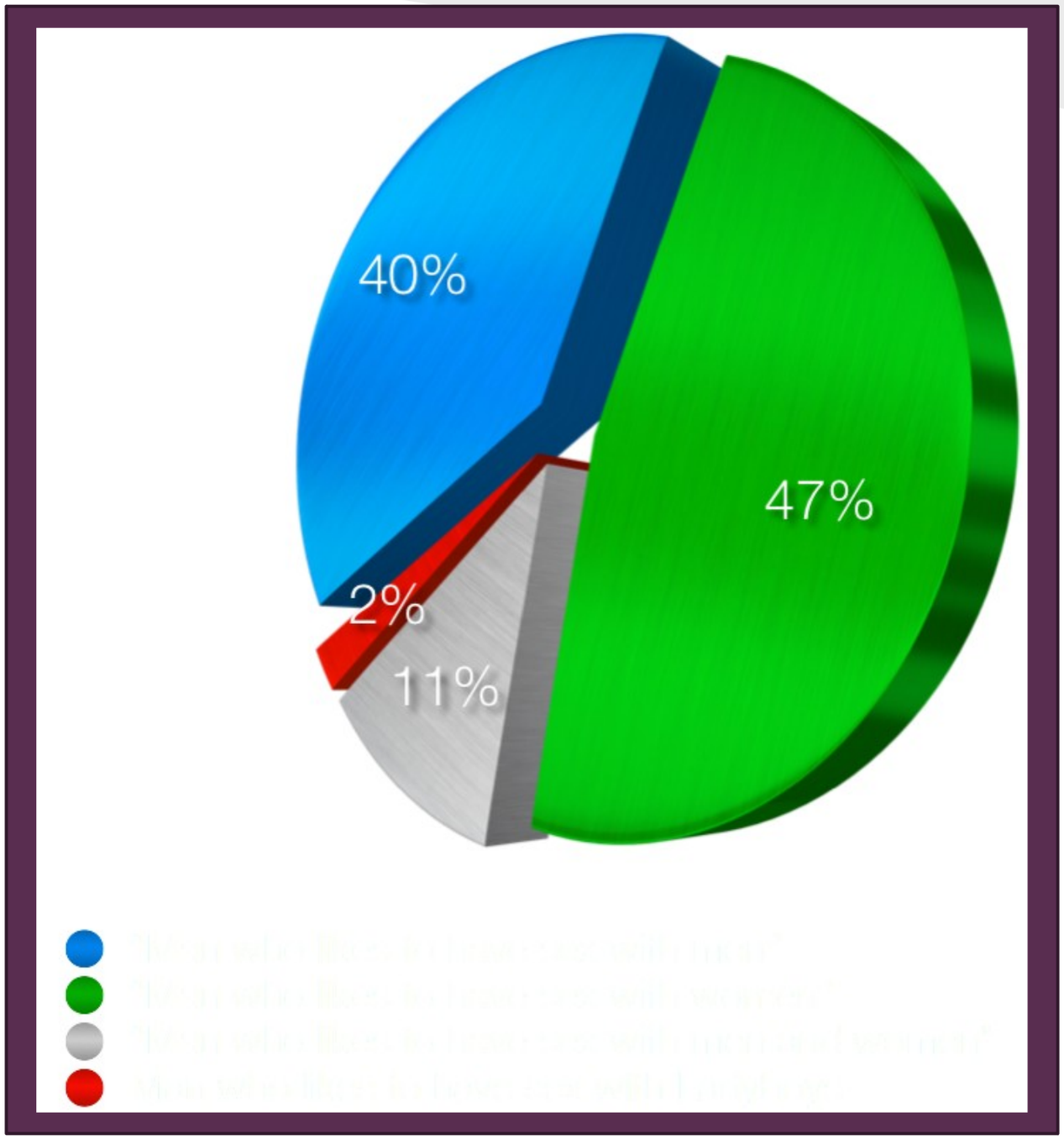
- Reported age range: **18-32 years**
- **16%** had begun work before the age of 18.



“I don’t tell my family, or even my roommates because I don't want them to talk badly about me.”

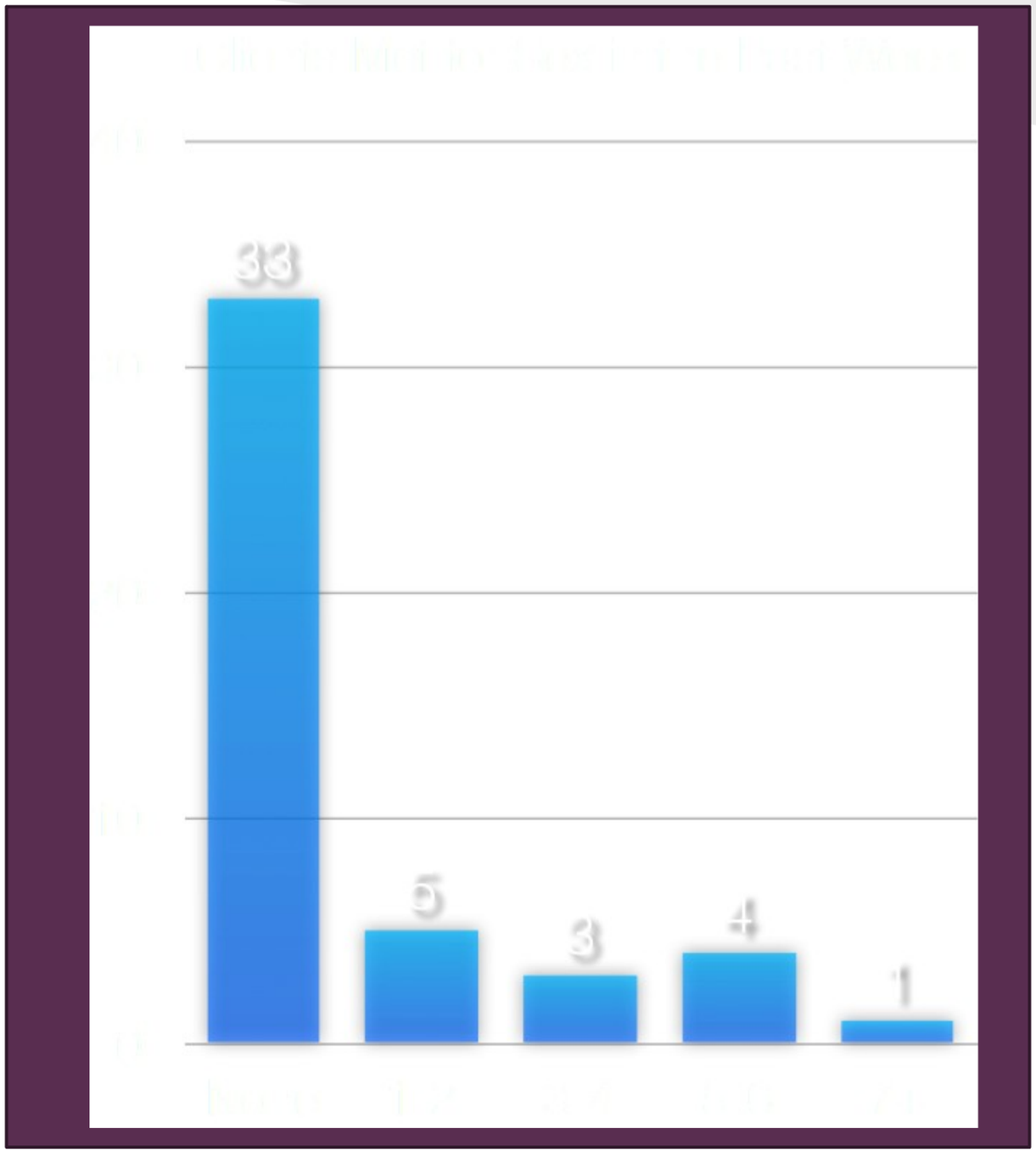
Sexual Identity

- The sexual identity of a man in Cambodian society is (often) not based upon sexual behavior, but rather on his having a masculine or feminine character.
(UNESCO, 2008)
  - “MSM Long Hair”
  - “MSM Short Hair”



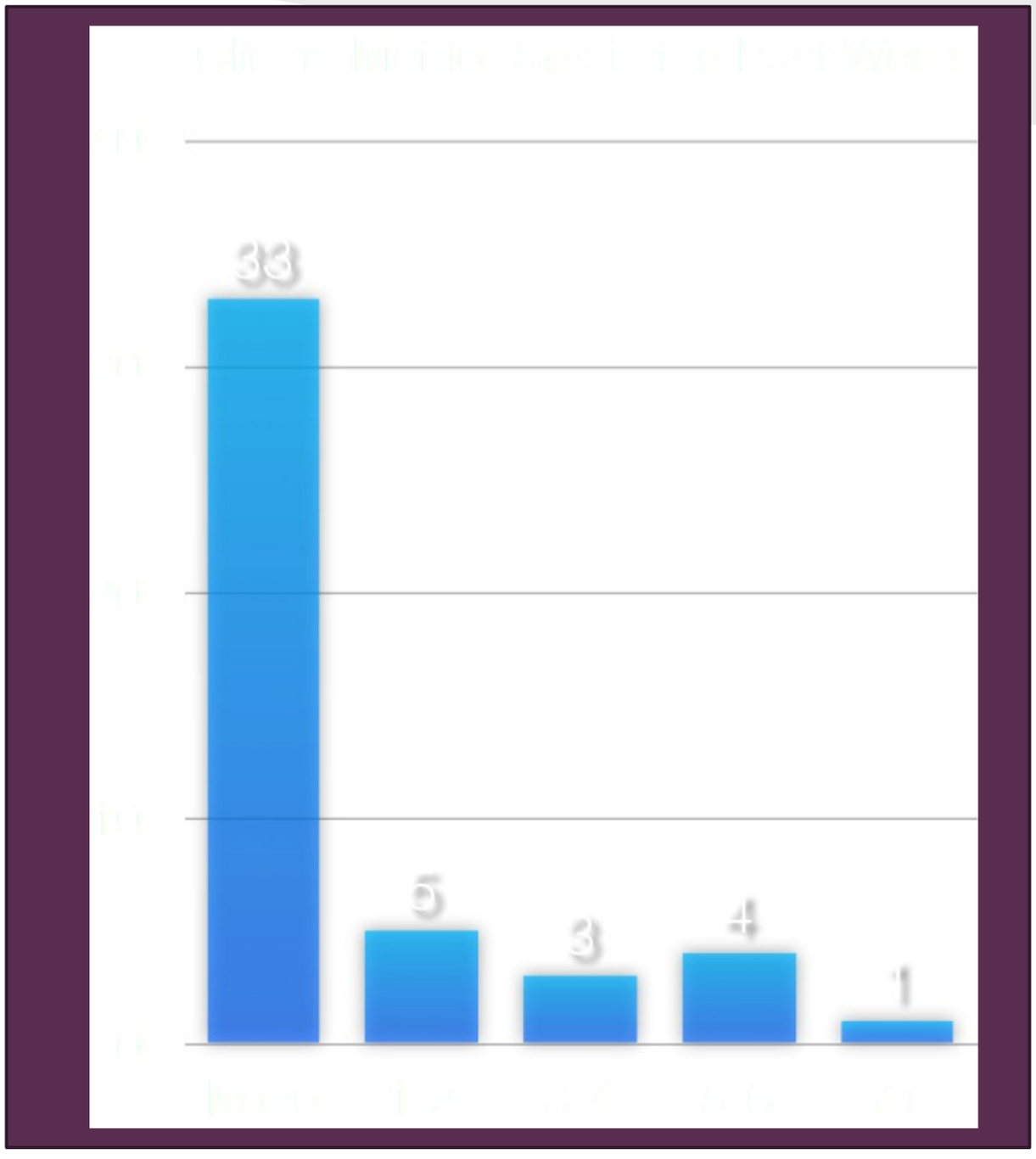
Sexual Experiences with Clients

- **Range = 0-20 clients** within the past week.
- **Median = 1.2 clients**



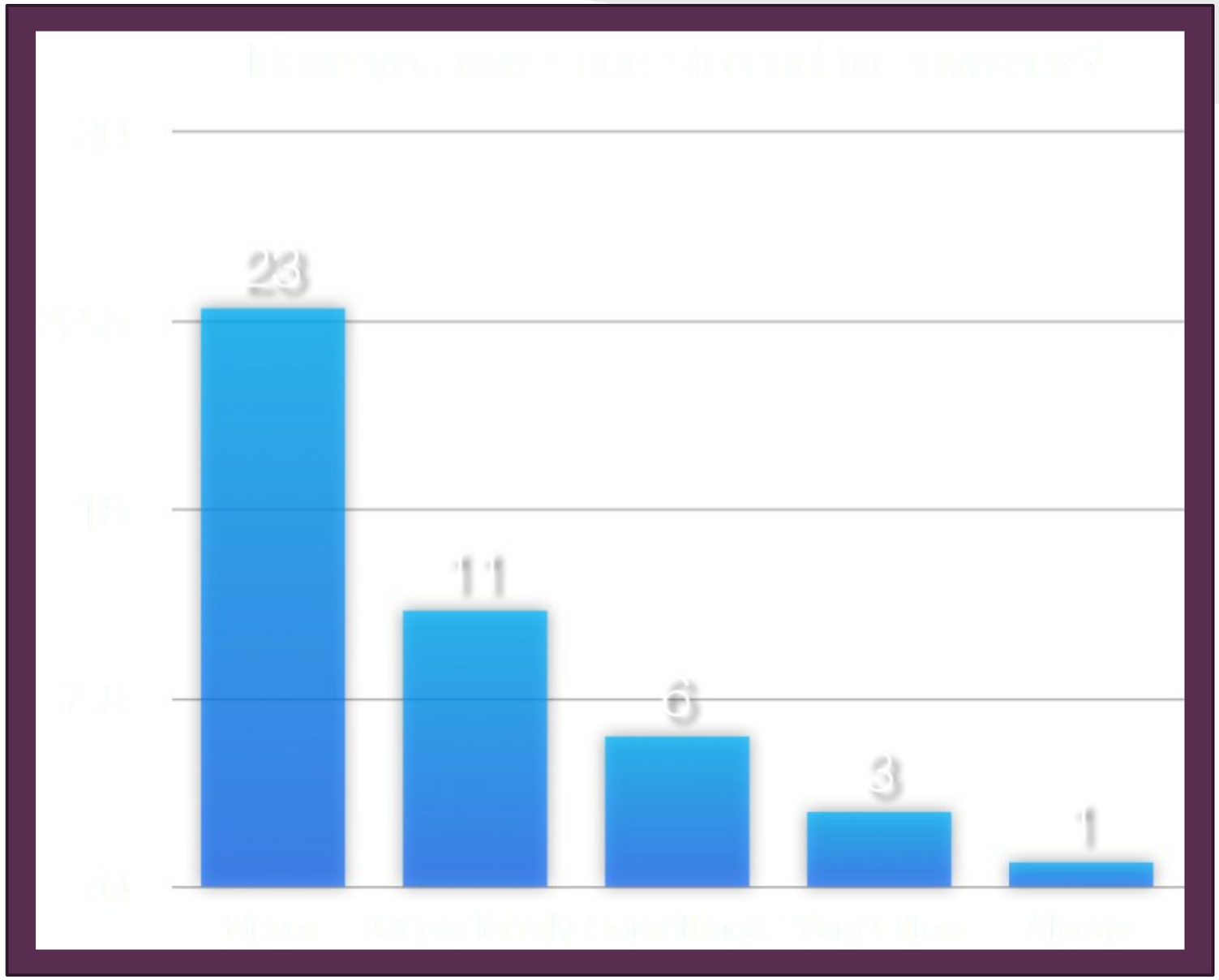
Sexual Experiences with Clients

- **16%** indicate having sex with multiple clients at the same time.
- **6%** state that they do this often.
- One estimated doing this about 45 times within the past three months.



Experiences of Violence

Nearly half (47%) report being forced to have sex.



Experiences of Violence

- **Nearly half** of these report attempts to reject sexual advances.
- **Several** report anger or additional aggression from clients upon rejecting their advances.
- **A few** indicate other forms of physical violence, including pulling of hair, and being stripped of clothing.

“I was forced to have sex. He got angry but I disagreed. Usually customers never tell us upfront that they want sex."

22 years old, from Kampong Cham

“Sometimes they ask me, sometimes they force me. If I disagree they become angry with me.”

20 years old, from Siem Reap

Analysis
Divergent Markets

- **Male Only Venues:**
  - Usually hidden from public view
  - “Sexualized” environment, Phallic symbols (Implied Sexual Services)
  - Masseurs presented to clients behind glass showcase, shirtless
  - Advertised within local and international gay bars, hotels/resorts
- **Mixed Gender Venues:**
  - Very public, masseurs stand on street to advertise.
  - Simple massage services provided in front.
  - Other services (body, back, oil massages) provided in private room in back (or upstairs).

Analysis
Mixed Gender Massage

- Sex work seems more unregulated
- Sexual services neither acknowledged or openly implied.
- Masseurs unsure of client’s intentions: *“Customers never say up front that they want sex.”*
- Management turns a blind eye.
- Could establishments such as these serve as meeting point for male sex work, similar to KTV bars for females?

More than Gende

A baseline study of transgendered males in the sex industry in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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Sampling

- 50 self-identified transgender sex workers within or near the Phnom Penh area.
  - **35 interviews** collected through data gathering in public areas in Phnom Penh which are known for transgender sex work.
  - **6 interviews** collected from Men's Health Cambodia, a Local Khmer NGO working with LGBT Groups.
  - **9 interviews** collected in residential areas where transgender groups live.

- Purposive and "snowball" sampling methods.

Eligibility Criteria

- Biological Male at Birth
- Self-Identified as female or third gender
- Reporting to have had been paid to have sex within the past 3 months.
- Able and willing to give informed consent to participate in the study.

Ethical Considerati

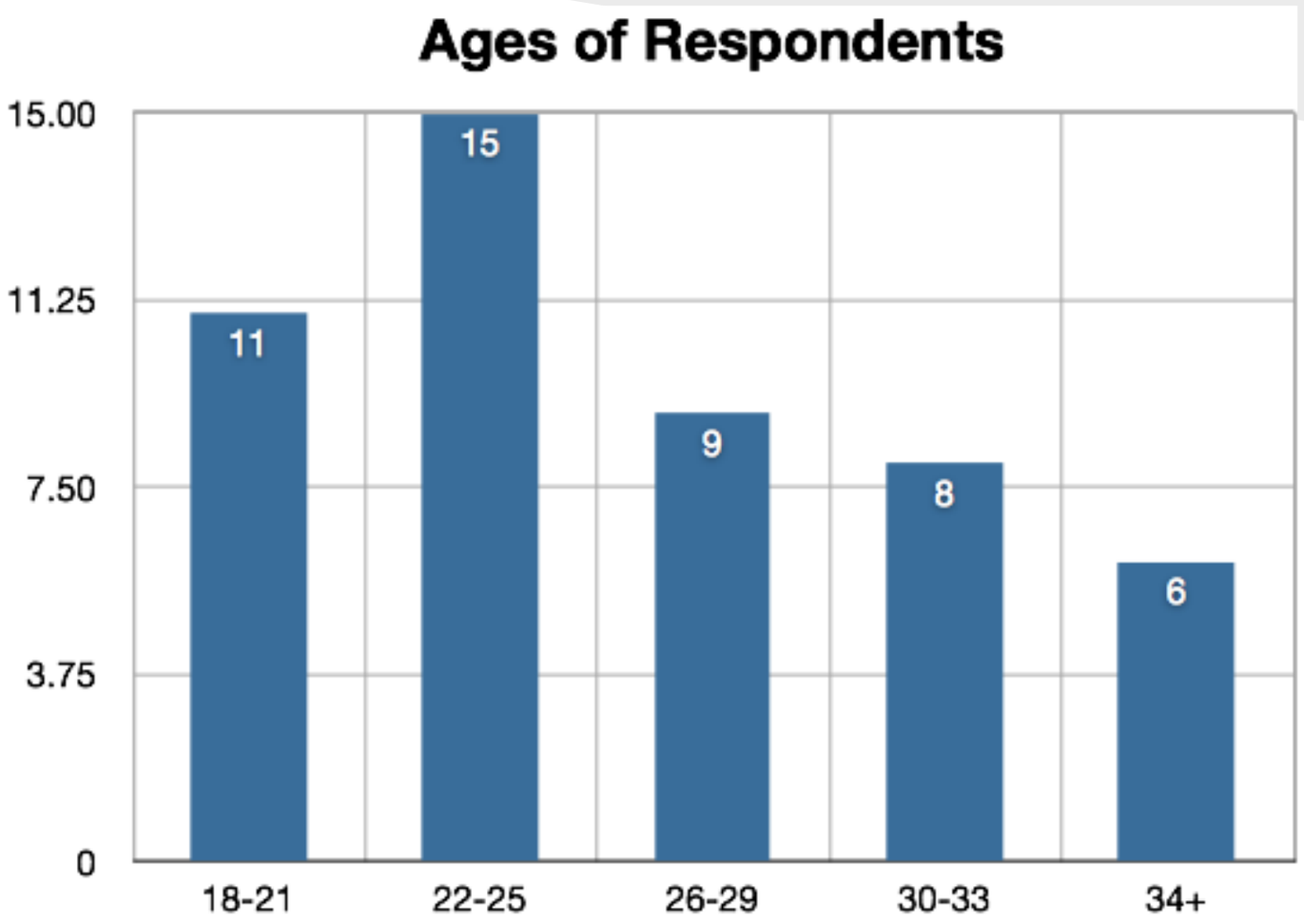
- Interviewer/Field Researcher training using UNIAP Ethical Guidelines for Human Trafficking Research
- References for Sexual Health, Counseling Services, and Legal Aid provided.
- Respondents could choose to skip any question or stop the interview at any time.

Demographics

Nearly half of respondents fall within UNICEF's definition of youth (15-24 years)

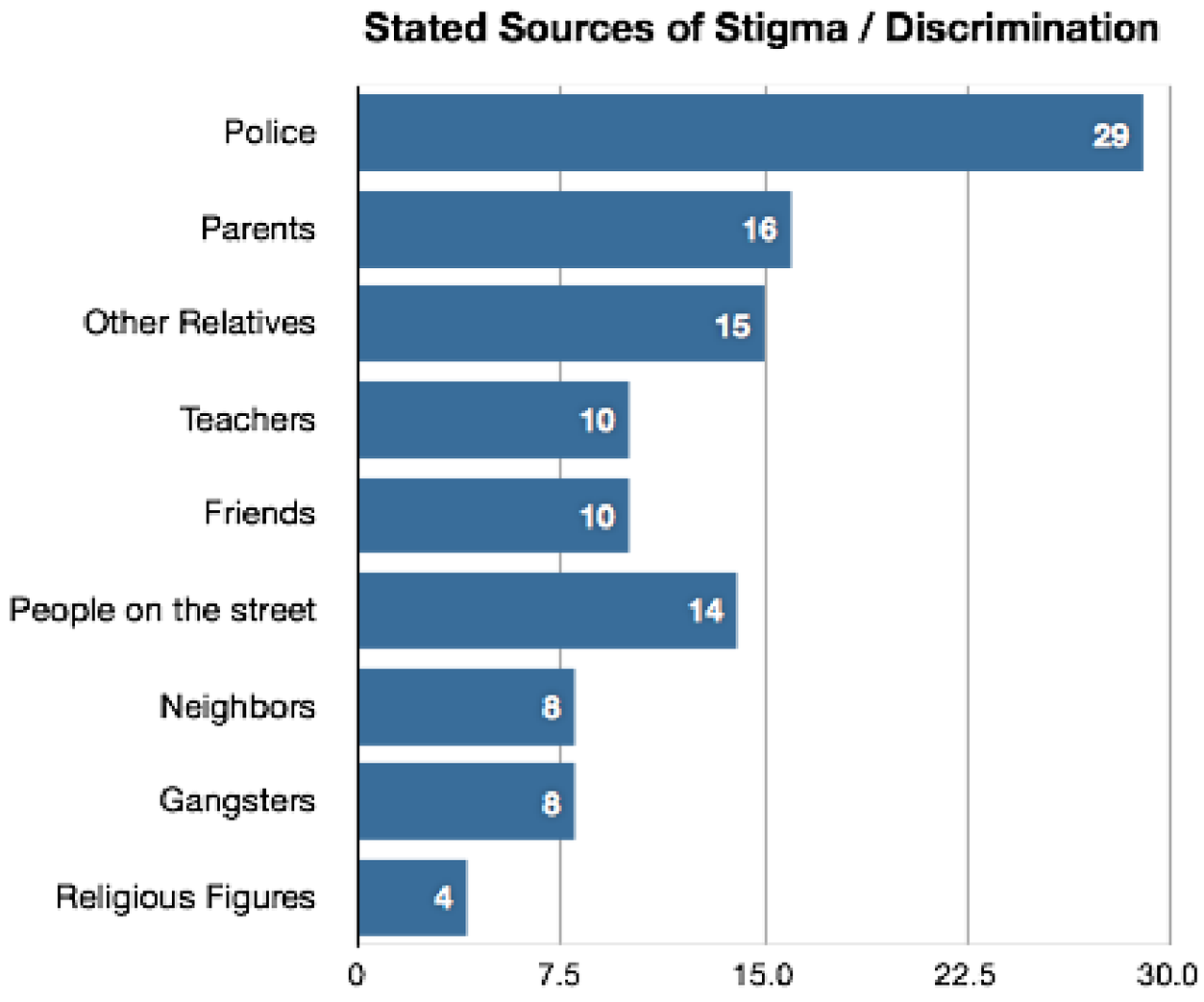
16% said they began sex work before the age of 18

88% began before the age of 24



"I am doing this [sex work] to help my family pay our debt. I'd rather get hurt as long as my family is happy. I cry often after I go out with clients."

Stigma / Discrimination



“If I cut my hair short and dress up as a man they will let me study or work, but if I dress up as a girl with long hair I will not be allowed to go to school or work.”

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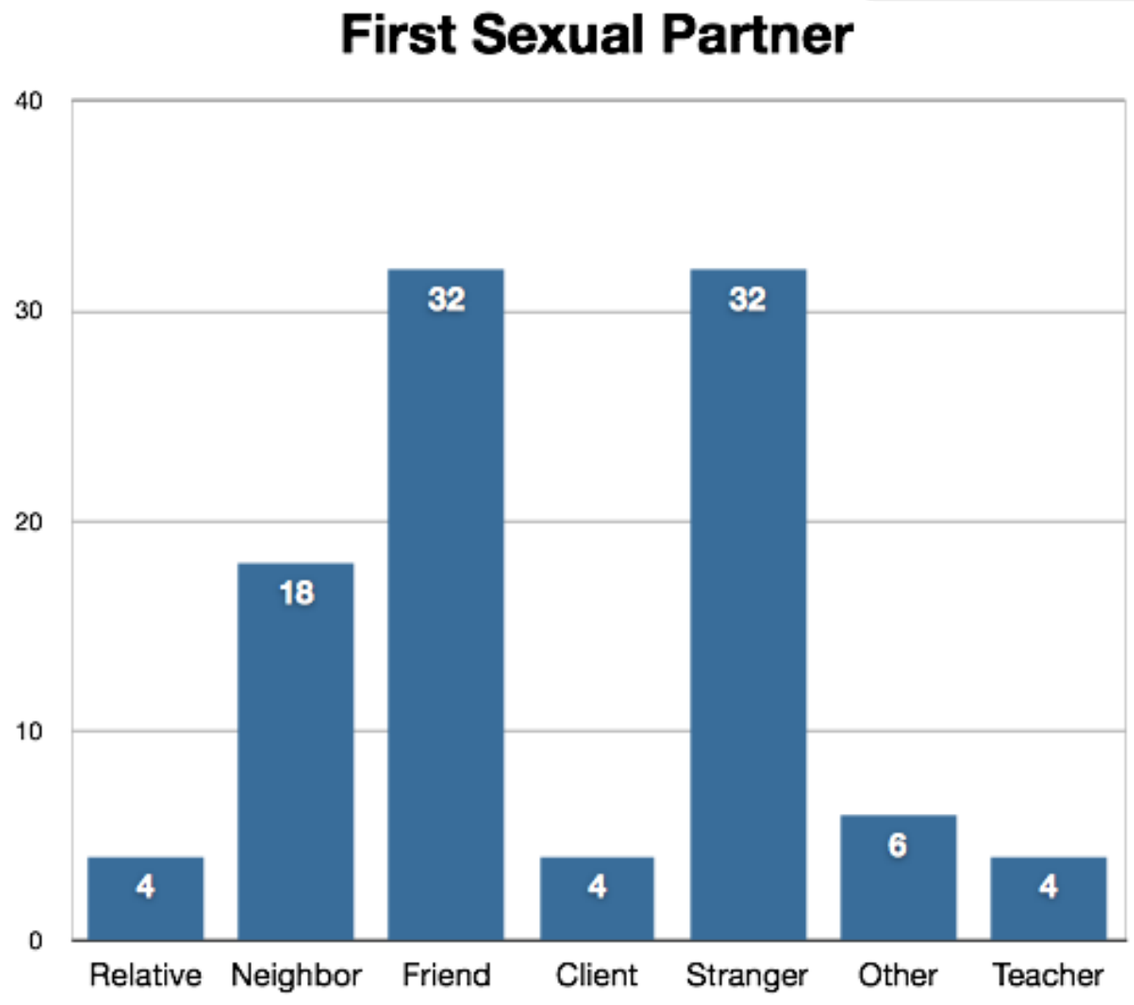
“People stop me from going to the pagoda because they're afraid I will go to have sex with the monks.”

Sexual / Gender Identity

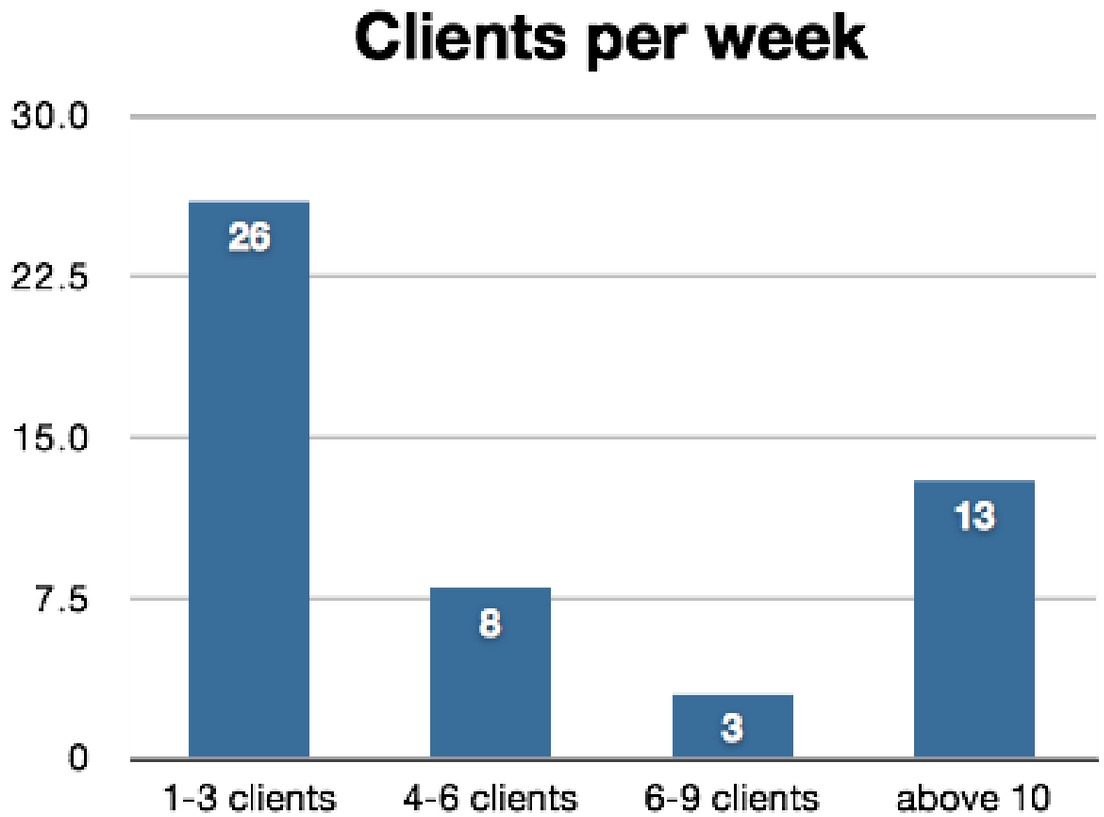
All stated that their first sexual partners were male.

For 1 in 5, their first sexual experience was 'forced or coerced'.



"When I was 12 a group of people took me far away from home, beat me up and left me there. One guy (25) rescued me and took me home. He asked if he could have sex with me. I said yes because he rescued me."

Sex Work

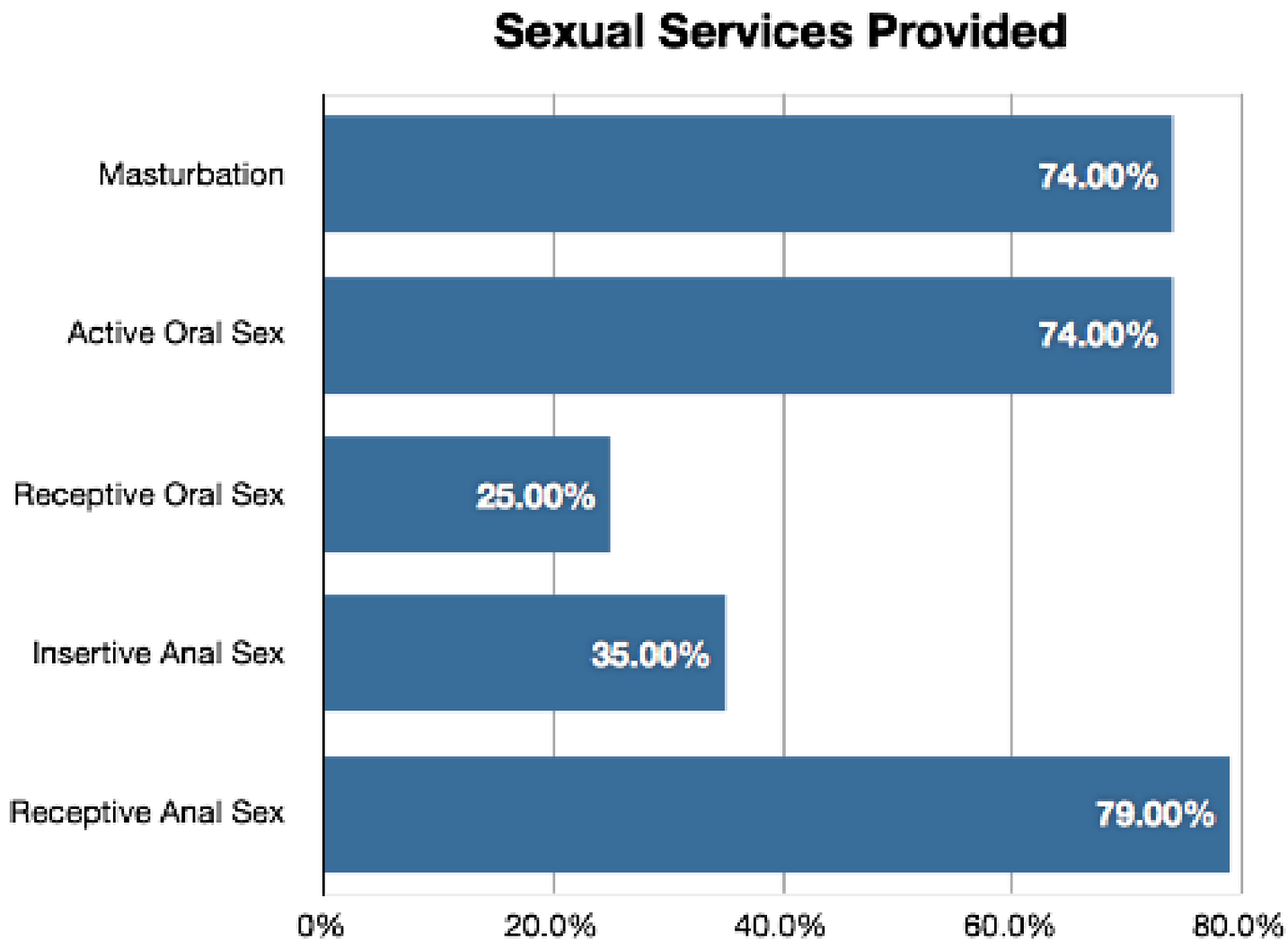


Average = 7; Minimum = 1; Maximum = 35.

75% of clients are Khmer

36% indicate group sex (orgies) with clients within the past 3 months

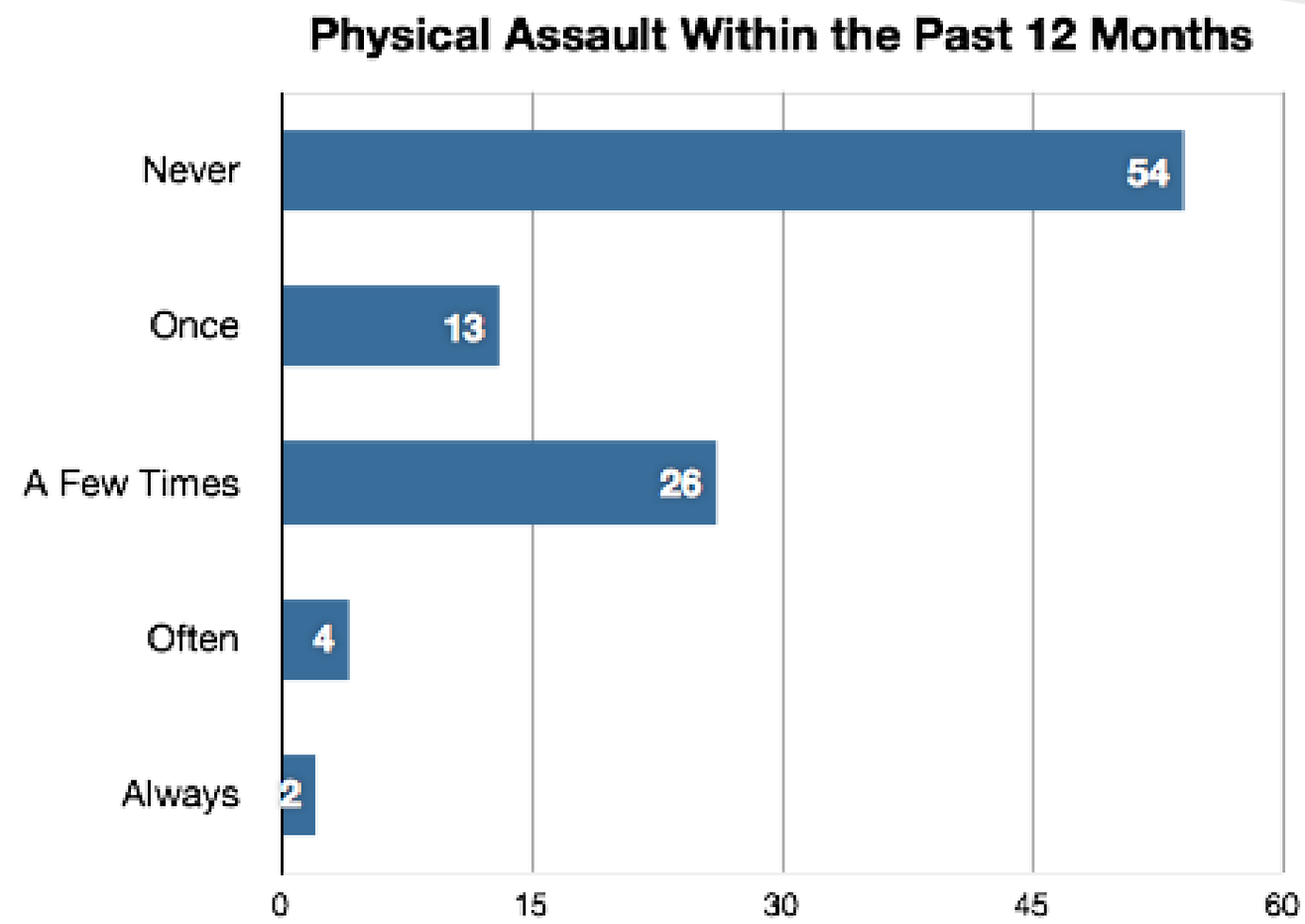
Sex Work


Sexual Services Provided
Masturbation
74.00%
Active Oral Sex
74.00%
Receptive Oral Sex
25.00%
Insertive Anal Sex
35.00%
Receptive Anal Sex
79.00%
0%
20.0%
40.0%
60.0%
80.0%

Violence and Sexual A

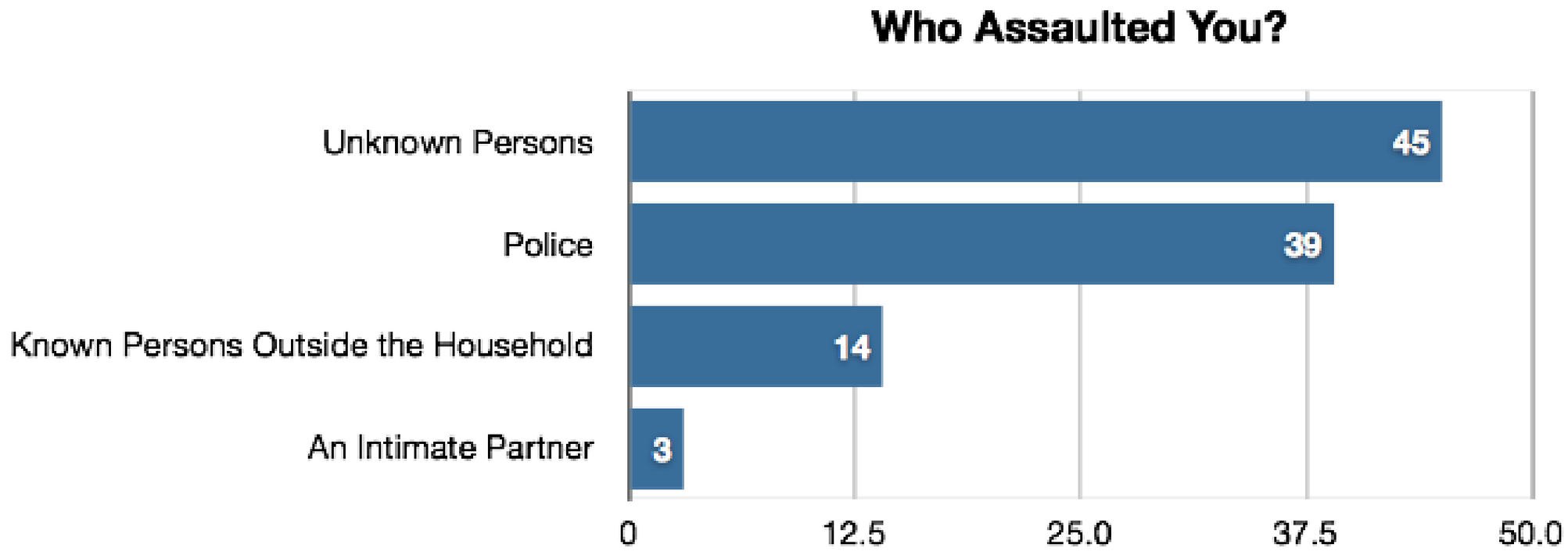
74% indicate sexual harassment (unsolicited touching, fondling, etc) within the past 12 months

40% state that they have experienced physical assault within the past 12 months.



Violence and Sexual A

Nearly **40%** of assaults are reported to be **committed by the police**



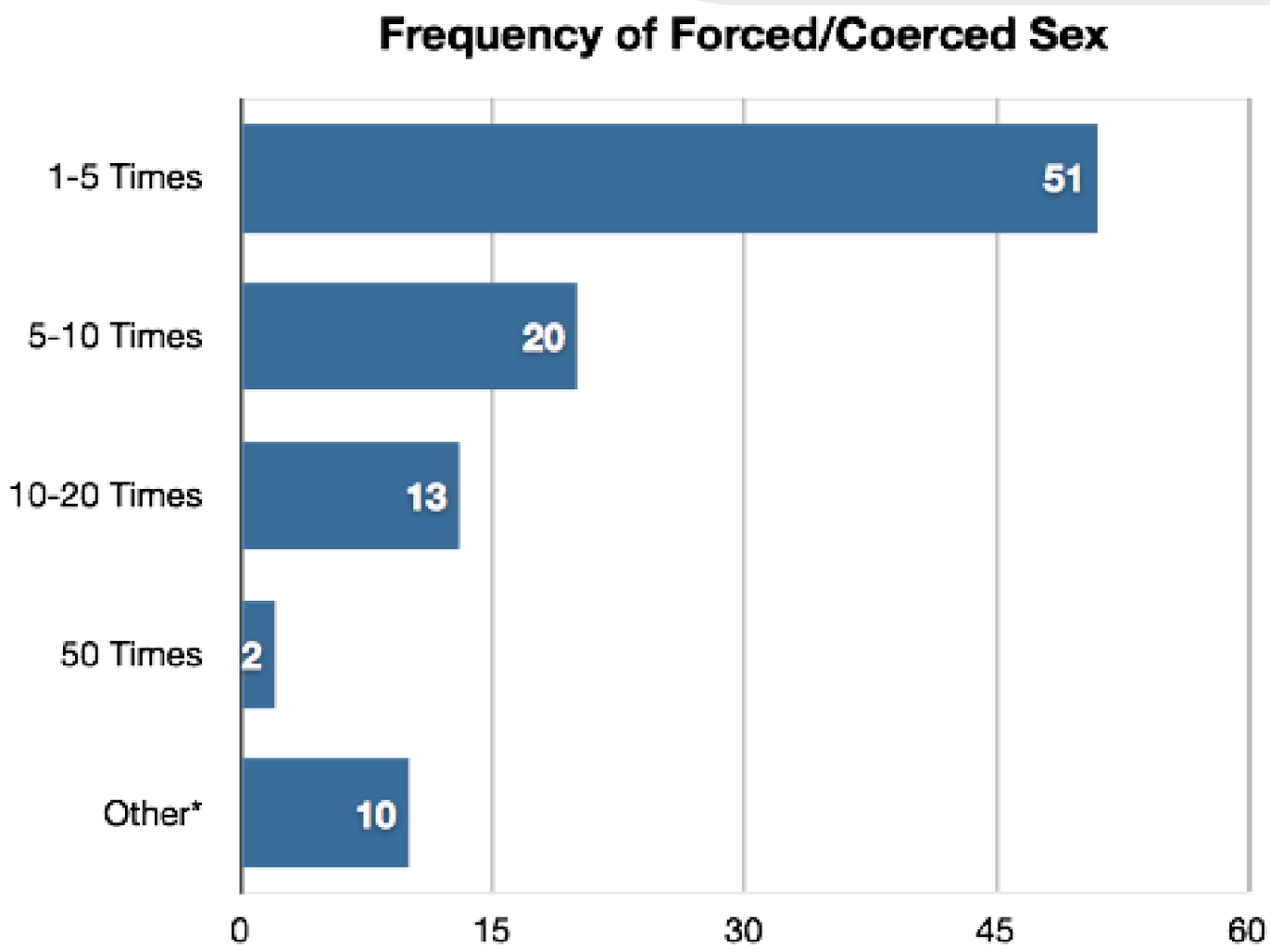
"*I really hate the police. They chase us like dogs.*"

”One Policeman here pointed a gun at my head, threatening me to have sex with him."

Violence and Sexual A

Over half (55%) indicate instances of forced or coerced sex.

54% indicate an awareness of other transgendered persons who are forced to have sex against their



* Other responses include 3 non-quantifiable responses: 2 - “sometimes” and 1 - “a lot”

Violence and Sexual A

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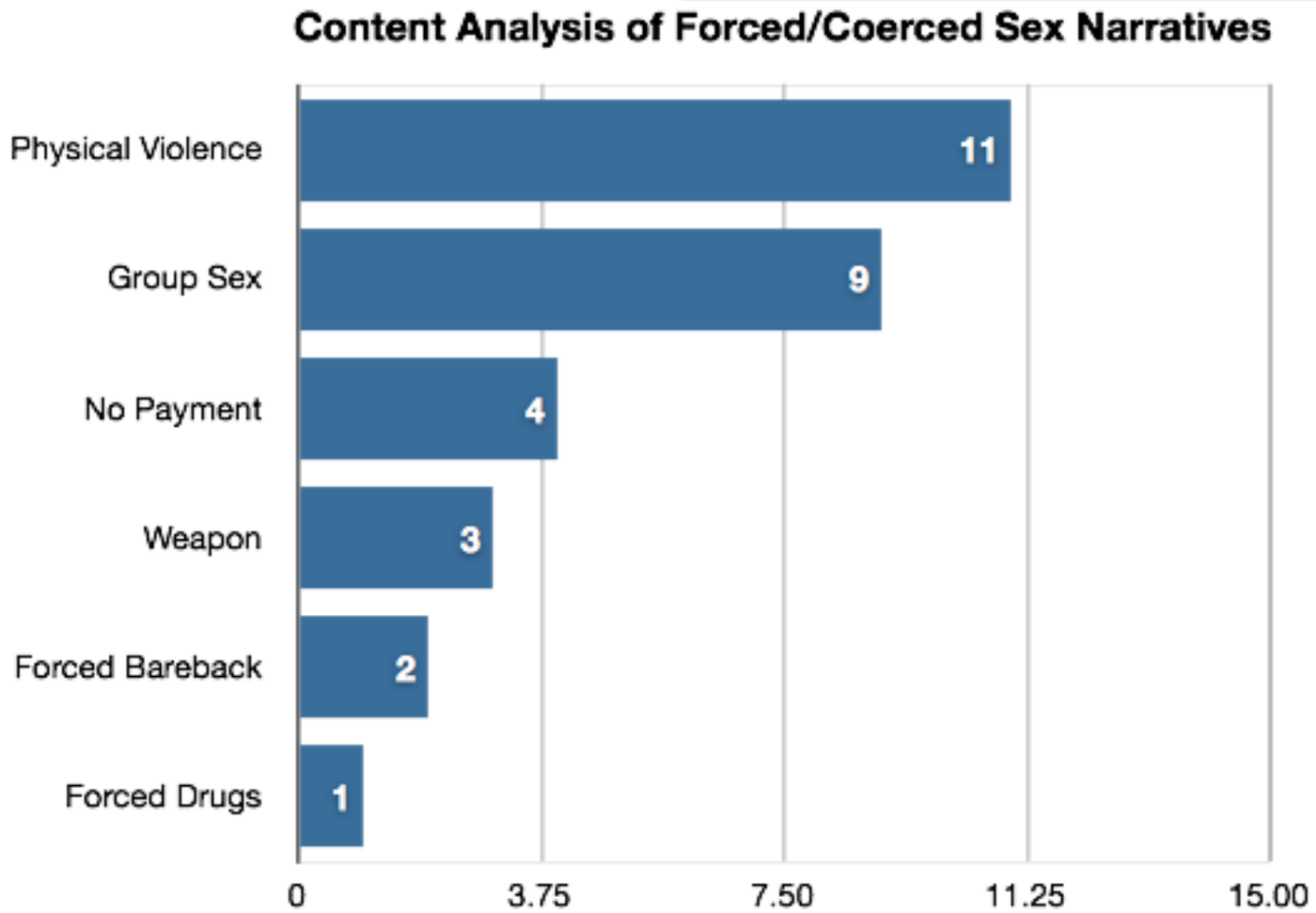
“While I was hanging out with (clients) they enticed me to go to the forest and forced me to have sex. When I refused, they strangled me, so I gave in. It was a group of 6 or 7 guys.”



“A group of people forced me to have sex with them at the same time. They held me down and had sex with me. When I tried to move, they pointed a knife at me. They would kill me if I didn't (do it).”

“If I didn't 'do it well' [oral sex and masturbation] they would beat me up. They asked for money but I didn't give it to them and then they beat me up.”

Discussion

- High Vulnerability for Physical Abuse/Sexual Violence
- Seemingly inherent fatalism within Transgender Social Identity, Narrow perception of options for the future.
- Significant isolation from key identity-shaping structures in society.
  - Common estrangement from Families
  - High-identification with other transgender
  - Little if any community integration

Recommendations

- Continued **careful** research that recognizes and affirms **holistic** human need/vulnerability.
- Creation of social services and "safe spaces" which cater to the development of **whole, integrated persons**.
- Free or low-cost **vocational and life skills training** programs provided by NGO’s would be greatly beneficial for young men and transgender working in this industry.