

Gay Students as Masseurs in a Gay Spa

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research aimed to study factors leading to the decision of 10 gay students, selected by the snowball technique, to work as masseurs in a gay spa, their lifestyle and attitude towards their occupation, and the suggested solutions to problems. Data from direct observations and in-depth interviews were synthesized and descriptively presented. The research results indicated that the sample consisted of 19–25 year-olds who came from all regions in Thailand, studied in either state or private universities, were gay, bisexual or both with active and passive sexual orientations. Their expenses were mainly covered by their parents. Factors leading to their decision to work as masseurs in a gay spa and also to engage in sex services were economic (money problems, physical capital, and the decision to work as a masseur in gay spa) and social (adolescent development, influence from friends, family, communication, and mass communication).

The research results clearly pointed out that the sale of sex services is a social issue that needs cooperation from various parties to achieve a solution. Social control measures, social organization, fair working conditions, and payment should be regulated by the public sector. The ability of gays, their equal rights, and freedom to conduct their livelihood should be accepted by society. Suitable instruction, monitoring, and enhancing the extra-curriculum activities should be provided by the family and the educational institutions. Gay students themselves should carefully choose their friends, live and plan their study well, and should be able to differentiate rights from wrongs in order not to fall into materialistic traps.

Keywords: gay, gay student, masseur, gay spa

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพครั้งนี้ มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาปัจจัยที่ทำให้นักศึกษาเกย์ตัดสินใจประกอบอาชีพเป็นพนักงานในสปาเกย์ วิถีชีวิต ตลอดจนทัศนคติในการประกอบอาชีพและแนวทางการแก้ไขปัญหาของนักศึกษาเกย์ดังกล่าว กลุ่มตัวอย่าง คือนักศึกษาเกย์ที่ประกอบอาชีพพนักงานนวดในสปาเกย์ในกรุงเทพมหานครจำนวน 10 คน ซึ่งได้มาด้วย

วิธีการเลือกตัวอย่างแบบบอกต่อ เก็บข้อมูลจากการสังเกตพฤติกรรม รวมทั้งการสัมภาษณ์แบบเจาะลึก สัมภาษณ์ข้อมูลและนำเสนอผลการวิจัยด้วยวิธีพรรณนา ผลการวิจัยพบว่า กลุ่มตัวอย่างมีอายุ 19–25 ปี มีภูมิลำเนาอยู่ในทุกภาคของประเทศ ปัจจุบันกำลังศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี ทั้งในมหาวิทยาลัยของรัฐและมหาวิทยาลัยเอกชน สถานภาพทางเพศ ได้แก่ ไบและโบท ส่วนรสนิยมทางเพศ ได้แก่ รุก โบทถนัดรุกและถนัดรับ บิดามารดาเป็นผู้อุปการะค่าใช้จ่ายเป็น

หลัก ปัจจัยที่ทำให้เข้าสู่อาชีพพนักงานนวดที่
 แอบแฝงขายบริการทางเพศ ประกอบด้วย ปัจจัยทาง
 เศรษฐกิจ ได้แก่ ปัญหาทางการเงิน ทุนทางกายภาพ
 และการตัดสินใจเข้าสู่อาชีพพนักงานนวดในสปาเกย์
 ส่วนปัจจัยทางสังคม ได้แก่ พัฒนาการของวัยรุ่น
 อิทธิพลของกลุ่มเพื่อน ครอบครัว ตลอดจนการ
 สื่อสารและสื่อสารมวลชน

จากผลการวิจัยทำให้เห็นว่าการขายบริการ
 ทางเพศเป็นประเด็นทางสังคม การแก้ไขสิ่งที่เกิดขึ้น
 ควรได้รับความร่วมมือจากทุกฝ่าย กล่าวคือ ภาครัฐ
 ควรควบคุมดูแลสถานบริการ มาตรการควบคุมทาง
 สังคม จัดระเบียบสังคม กำหนดสภาพการทำงานและ
 ผลตอบแทนที่ยุติธรรม ภาคสังคมควรยอมรับความ
 สามารถ สิทธิและเสรีภาพในการดำเนินชีวิตของ
 บุคคลที่เท่าเทียมกัน สถาบันครอบครัวและสถาน
 ศึกษาช่วยเหลือในการอบรมสั่งสอน สอดส่องดูแล
 และส่งเสริมกิจกรรมยามว่างให้เหมาะสมกับวัย ส่วน
 นักศึกษาเกย์ซึ่งเป็นตัวแปรสำคัญในการเกิดปัญหา
 ดังกล่าว ควรระมัดระวังการคบเพื่อน รู้จักการดำเนิน
 ชีวิตและการวางแผนทางการศึกษาเล่าเรียน ตลอดจน
 สามารถแยกแยะสิ่งที่ถูกต้องเพื่อมิให้หลงผิดและตก
 เป็นเหยื่อของวัตถุนิยม

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INTRODUCTION

The division of gender into two opposite
 sides—male and female—may not suit present day
 society (Santasombat, 2005). The issues of gender
 are varied and complex and include both gays and
 lesbians. The sexual orientation of these groups
 may not be adequately explained by the general
 concept. At the same time, sexual diversity in Thai
 society has increasingly become more pronounced,
 attracting interest from the general public that has
 become more curious about this topic and other
 related issues.

Sexual services have been available in Thai

society for a long time and have been increasing
 through the years, transforming from solely female
 prostitutes with little or no education. Tinnakul
 (2001) reported that from 1999 to 2001, there were
 2,820,000 prostitutes in Thailand. Among these, 2
 million were female, 800,000 were child prostitutes,
 and the rest were males. Most prostitutes were 18–
 26 years old, with primary education up to a
 bachelor's degree. They entered the trade from their
 friend's suggestion. There were about 60,000
 establishments, both direct and indirect, located all
 over the country. Child prostitutes and male
 prostitutes are on the rise because of the increasing
 demand for them, especially through night
 entertainment establishments and chat rooms on the
 Internet that have disguised sex services
 (Singhanetra, 2008).

The human body is legally not for sale. But
 it has become a commodity with ever increasing
 demand, especially that of a child and a woman
 (Santasombat, 1992). The form of services has also
 changed with time and the demand of customers
 from discotheque to sauna, to karaoke, to pub, and
 finally to the gay spa that has become increasingly
 popular and can be handled through the Internet
 (Anonymous, 2010). From such a background, it can
 be argued that sex services disguised as gay spa
 services have become an important social problem
 that is worthy of investigation. This qualitative
 research studied a group of 10 gay students who
 worked as masseurs in a gay spa on Silom Road in
 Bangkok. The focus was on the factors that had led
 them into sex services, their lifestyle, and their
 attitude towards their profession. The research
 results should make the public more aware of the
 problem and provide much needed information that
 could be utilized by parents, teachers, instructors,
 educational institutions, and related agencies to
 formulate guidelines to resolve the problem in the
 future. To achieve successful resolution, cooperation
 from those concerned must be whole-hearted, albeit
 from the government, private organizations,
 educational institutions, religious institutions, or

families. Such co-operation should stem the problem and prevent it from expanding beyond control. One outcome could be the regulation of these gay spas that would provide fair pay and working conditions for the gay student-turned-masseur.

Objective

This research aimed to examine the factors influencing gay students to take up a job as a masseur in a gay spa with sex services as a sideline, their lifestyle, their attitude towards their profession, and ways to ameliorate problems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on the concept and theory concerning attitude, gender, gay lifestyle, and gay spas was reviewed as follows.

Allport (1935 as cited in Ua-amnoey, 2006) explained that attitude was the mental preparedness constructed from experience that might be visible through behavior. When an attitude, either positive or negative, is formed toward something, an individual is prepared to react accordingly. It is an important force on behavior. There are three components of attitude. First is the thought, the body of knowledge or experience, together with the added fact and the belief. Second is the feeling and emotions one has toward the target. It can be the evaluation of either positive or negative feeling that conforms to the knowledge about that particular subject. Third is the behavior that encompasses one's preparedness to react to or the tendency to act toward the target of such attitude (Ua-amnoey, 2006).

Society has defined sex, or gender, differently (Sae Kuai, 2001 as cited in Achavanitkul, 2004), as formed by each society down to the influencing factors of gender in Thai society. In some areas we can find matriarchy, with males moving into their spouse's household (Santasombat, 2005). In such a society, females have the dominant role and more power within the household than in a patriarchal society. Moreover, Buddhism is the

national religion in Thailand, and thus the main driving force in the Thai lifestyle from the very beginning to the present day. As a result, Buddhism has a great influence on the issue of gender in Thailand (Kabilsingh, 2005) as shown in the study of Keyes (1984) that considered the fact that ordination into monkhood is for males only and females can only hold on to the monk's robe to enter heaven. This discrimination emphasizes the belief that females can gain merit only through males. Today, gender in Thai society is much more complex and varied. There are transvestites, homosexuals, and bisexuals, as well as transsexuals. Other related terminology in this study is as follows.

"Gay" refers to males that prefer males as their partners. They might have sexual experience with females, but they still prefer males. Gays can be differentiated into "king", "queen" or "both" (Danthamrongkul, 2004).

"Bisexual" refers to males that can have relations with both males and females. These males possess a masculine physique and personality like any other male in society. They can have sexual relations with both sexes.

"Both" refers to those gays who can act sexually as an active as well as a passive partner.

"Gay spa" is a spa that only caters to gays. Duangwises (2010) reported that amongst services for gays in Bangkok, massage parlors and spas have increased at the fastest rate: from 17 establishments in 2004 to 63 in 2009, representing an increase of 270%. Such numbers also echo the popularity among gays for these services.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research applied the snowball technique for sample selection. The data, gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and note-taking, were descriptively analyzed and divided into three parts: personal background, job approach, attitude toward occupation and problem solving. Questions for the interviews were screened by one

thesis advisor and one other social scientist for appropriateness and completion before being tried out. The researcher selected one gay spa on Silom Road in Bangkok since several undergraduate students worked there as masseurs. The researcher could tap into the samples easily for the 10 case studies.

Verification of the data was carried out by the triangulation method. First, the data were checked for the time, place, and person to find out whether a different time, place, and different person would affect the data. Secondly, the researcher was checked by sending three research assistants to carry out the interviews. Even with different researchers the data should not be affected. Thirdly, the method for data gathering was checked by utilizing different methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and note-taking. These different methods should yield consistent data that reflect reality and be in harmony with the objectives.

The three research assistants were all males. The first one was a 24-year-old student in the Faculty of Tourism Industry and Hotels. The second one was 20 years old and studied in the Faculty of Science and Technology. The third was a 30-year-old graduate student in the Faculty of Economics. All three research assistants were trained in qualitative data collection.

Regarding the ethical issue of this research, the researcher was very careful when interpreting the data concerning sensitive sexual encounters, some of which were very exclusive, some could be retold openly, whereas some could not be told at all. To promote awareness in gay promiscuity is risky and dangerous since it might entail abnormal sexuality and be contrary to moral standards. Male bodies and masculinity have become commodities while gay identity has been increasingly linked with sexual relations. The researcher reviewed the data from the interviews and allowed the interviewees to voice their suggestions concerning the aspects that society could help, accept, and mitigate while the researcher was aware of their rights and freedom at

the same time. The fieldwork and the interviews took 10 months to complete, consisting of the following stages. First, the potential interviewees were contacted through the spa's manager and the researcher reserved time to talk with them. This phase took two months. The second phase involved several consecutive meetings to enhance the trust between the researcher and the interviewees. When the interviewees were comfortable with the researcher, meetings outside the spa were set up. This phase took another four months. The final phase saw the researcher working as the assistant manager in the Spa to seek factors leading to the decision to become part of the sex trade. The three research assistants then repeated the phases. This final stage took four months as well.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Study area

This research took place at a gay spa located on Silom Road, Bangkok, Thailand. The spa was a two-unit-three-storied townhouse providing eight massage rooms with a lobby for the customers and a lounge for the masseurs on the ground floor. The second and third floors contained the massage rooms. Interviews with the owner and the manager of the spa revealed the fact that it had been in operation for approximately five years, offering services from 2 to 12 p.m., with fifty masseurs working on a rotation basis, and monthly spa earnings of approximately 300,000 baht. The spa had an illustrated catalogue that the customers could view to select the masseur and the type of service such as a spa massage, aroma massage, cream massage, skin treatment, and milk bath. It also offered special discounts and happy hours for its exclusive members. The information gained from the in-depth interviews of the 10 masseurs is presented in two parts as follows.

Part 1: Personal background of the interviewees

The interviewees ranged in age from 19 to 25 years and came from all parts of Thailand: the North (Chiang Mai and Lampang), Central (Bangkok), the Northeast (Ubon Ratchathani and Nakhon Ratchasima), and the South (Surat Thani). All had been studying at the bachelor degree level in either public or private universities. Their gender orientations were bisexual or both bisexual and gay while their sexual preferences were active, active both, or passive both. Their parents were their main financial sources.

Part 2: Research results and comments

Details of data analysis are presented in three parts, as follows.

Factors leading to a career as a gay Spa masseur

The family backgrounds of the interviewees ranged from poor to well-to-do. They had moved to the capital for various reasons, mainly to further their education. They stayed alone, with families, or with friends. They chose to enter the massage business of their own free will, influenced by the advertising pamphlets distributed in gay pubs, searched from the Internet, or recommended by their friends. The amount of time to make the decision to work at the Spa ranged from less than one week to 2–5 months. They had been working in the spa between 1 and 4 years, earning a monthly income of 20,000–70,000 baht. Factors leading to this employment are as follows.

1. Financial factors

Sex services have been available in Thai society for a long time and are on the increase (Tinnakul, 2001). The sale of a sex service pattern has developed in tandem with socio-economic development from earlier times (Singhanetra, 2008). The increasing popularity of massage parlors and spas for gays has led to the proliferation of gay spas (Duangwises, 2010). Such spas usually offer sex services on the side. The number of gay students in the sex trade who are disguised as spa masseurs has

expanded and has become readily available. The trade involves good-looking male masseurs who also provide sex services at high fees. For instance, an oil massage costing 500 baht an hour with a 1,000 baht tip could be searched for and booked through the internet (Anonymous, 2010). These conditions easily lured gay students into the sale of sex services. An in-depth interview of one masseur revealed his earnings were at least 30,000 baht per month while the spa itself had huge revenues, hence the expansion of the service (Anonymous, 2012). Financial factors revealed by the interviewees included the following.

1.1 Money problems

Money is an essential factor in one's life. For gay students, money was paramount since they had various expenditures including tuition fees and daily expenses, as reflected in the interviews.

“... my family is rather poor, headed by my grandmother. I have to pay for my own education as well as providing my family back home with 10,000 baht a month. . .” (Ball).

“... I come from a middle class family. My Dad is a farmer. My Mom is an assistant chef. I love the night-life, drinking, and visiting various pubs. . .” (Base)

The monthly expenses of the gay students in the study ranged between 6,000 and 35,740 baht. Some had overwhelming expenditures that prompted them to find other sources of income such as working as a gay spa masseur with hidden sales of sex services that could earn a lot of money. The higher income not only satisfied their own needs but also enabled them to live quite well in society. This finding concurs with Tinnakul's (2001) research in 2001 that found that males mostly entered prostitution because of financial need: unemployment or simply the lack of money. If they had another occupation but were in need of ready cash, they would take up prostitution again and again. However, some of the gay students had no choice but to turn to prostitution when other overwhelming problems needed their immediate

attention. As a result, they exchanged their bodies for a large sum of money that could be earned quite easily.

1.2 Physical capital

The human body can be seen as “capital” to earn the income and has become a “commodity” that can be bought and sold or exploited regardless of the owner’s physical and mental conditions. Therefore, gay students became a commodity in the sale of sex service because “. . . he looks good with a Chinese complexion. He’s handsome with big eyes, a skinhead, and good light skin. He can easily become a star because of good muscular physique. He weighs 66 kilograms, is 178 centimeters tall, and is 20 years of age. . .”(Golf).

Such good looks could translate into the capital to earn money. However, these students realized that with advancing age, their bodies would change; they would have fewer customers and could earn decreasing income. Humans use their body as a sexual attraction that has become a kind of treasure trove that can be exchanged for several things. As Santasombat (1992) explained, human bodies were not meant to be sold in the beginning but over the years they have become a much sought after commodity in the sex trade, especially with regard to children and women involved in prostitution.

2. Social factors

Social factors that led gay students into the sex trade are as follows.

2.1 Adolescent development

Adolescence involves great development: physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. It could be called one of the critical moments in life, since tremendous forces are at play to push and motivate development in other aspects as well and without the “correct” role model, in this phase an individual could become lost (Kaewkungwal, 2010).

“. . . I chose this career because I felt bored with life. After school, I didn’t have much to do so I wanted to earn some extra money.” (Gym)

“. . . I don’t have a father. My Mom is the one who brought me up and has been taking care of

me all these years. I chose this job by myself after being told by a friend about it. . .” (Base).

Lack of close family ties and caring could result in an adolescent struggling and making an inappropriate decision in life. Without proper care and guidance, an adolescent could make a wrong turn and end up in a most difficult situation. Kaewkungwal (2010) mentioned that adolescence was the time when a person had full development in all aspects. An adolescent has to face new changes that differ from childhood, mostly physically, mentally, intellectually, and socially. If such development progresses in the right direction, the adolescent could have good physical and mental health that would ready them for adulthood.

2.2 Influence of friends

An adolescent is mostly influenced by friends, especially how they dress, talk, act, believe and think, including their taste and values. If they are among “good” friends, they would develop a tendency toward a good learning experience. On the other hand, if their friends are “bad”, they would mistakenly catch all the bad aspects in learning.

“. . . before I became a masseur, a friend of mine recommended the place to me. . .” (Hockey).

“. . . before I chose to become a masseur, I heard of this spa from my senior friend at university who persuaded me to work here. . .” (Karate)

All 10 gay students under study paid much attention to their friends. They were closer to their friends than their own parents or guardians. As reported by Tinnakul (2001), the most outstanding motivation in the sale of sex services came from friend’s advice and/or influence.

2.3 Family influence

The family is the primary social institution. Without the love and care of a family, a family member could make a wrong decision and end up in the sale of sex services. One gay student had a broken home: “. . . my parents got a divorce. My Dad is quite old now but he gives me a monthly allowance of 2,000 baht. . .” (Golf). Another confessed that “. . . I am very close to my Mom

since I am an only child. I like the night life and sexual relations. . .” (Base).

Interestingly, the gay students under study were from either broken homes or good families. The former lacked good, loving care while the latter were considered “good sons” of the family. However, they all ended up in the same establishment, working as masseurs and selling sex services alike. Therefore, family influence alone could not account for such behavior.

2.4 Communication and mass communication

It is clear that mass communication is very important in everyday life. Advertisements can have a strong influence on the decisions a person makes.

“. . . I went to Silom Road and saw the job announcement for masseurs. So I went in and applied for the job. . .” (Ping Pong).

“. . . I’ve learned of this business from the Internet and started looking for its websites, thinking that it might offer me something to do. When I found the website, I also discovered that they were advertising for masseurs. I didn’t hesitate to apply so I could earn a living and pay for my education at the same time. . .” (Golf).

Ping Pong was the only one who wasn’t influenced by his friend’s recommendation to take up the massage job. Subsequently, he decided to participate in the sale of sex services of his own accord.

Mass communication, especially web-based, has taken on a new phase in advertisement and has become an avenue for both the masseur and the customer to “meet”. An adolescent can spend a lot of time surfing the Internet for various reasons. One of them is to find a job. Singhanetra (2008) found that the sale of sex services could be discretely handled through the Internet by the gay spa or the masseurs themselves.

2. Decision-making for a career

A person usually chooses what is best for him or her. Sometimes this involves getting advice from friends or finding the information oneself that

leads to making a decision. One masseur told the researcher that:

“. . . I had money problems. A friend recommended this job to me because the pay was good and the work was not difficult. So I decided to become a masseur. . .” (Ball).

“. . . I decided to become a masseur four years ago. It took me less than a week to decide since I wanted the job and to make a lot of money. . .” (Hockey)

It can be clearly seen from the above interviews that the money problem encountered by gay students actually stemmed from their own lack of financial discipline. Since their parents gave them allowances, they didn’t think much when they used the money unwisely. Most of them enjoyed the good things in life, such as brand-name goods, and they were hooked by materialism. When they realized that their allowance could not cover all the expenses, they had to find a “quick fix” and readily entered the gay spa as masseurs. The job turned out to be an easy one that they could work in after school or during their spare time. Other factors included the information from various sources, the easy access of the resources, their own curiosity and motivation, and the company of well-paying customers. These factors could inevitably lead to sexual relations. Srijantr et al. (2005) found that gay students could be successful in life or they could solve their own problems accordingly if, and only if, they could think rationally and were well suited to the situation. That is to say that they could make the correct decision for easy issues up to the most complex ones if necessary.

3. Lifestyle of gay students

Lifestyle is constructed by humans from the natural and social environment as well as the human mind (Tinnakul, 2001). This involves taking on a job, the ensuing income and one’s health while working, as well as the attitude toward a future occupation, as reflected by the following interviews.

“. . . after school, I’ll work as a masseur, earning around 10,000–20,000 per month. This

work doesn't affect my health. I plan to quit after I can save enough money. . .” (Bat).

“ . . . I usually have about three customers per day. They have to make a reservation. I will go to their chosen place to give the massage after school, say, 3-10 p.m. I earn around 50,000-70,000 baht a month. But the work does affect my health. I think that I'll keep working until I graduate. After that I won't do it any longer. I also plan to find another job that is more secure and will give me a good career path. . .” (Rugby)

From the in-depth interview with the sample group, one learns firstly that each of the gay students under study had different sexual experiences. Although the researcher interviewed each person repeatedly, some chose to withhold some information while others were more open. Some topics were discussed in detail whereas other topics were not disclosed at all due to the sensitive nature of gender. Therefore, extreme care must be exercised when touching on such subject matter. However, it became clear from the interviews that the sale of sex services among adolescents was on the increase as supported by the research conducted by Tinnakul (2001). It was reported that educated prostitutes with up to the bachelor degree education entered the trade through a friend's suggestion and the accessibility that had been available directly or indirectly in terms of various night entertainment businesses. The increase in child and male prostitutes throughout the years was the result of the increase in the demand for them by the customers of these businesses (Duangwises, 2010) as well as the effective Internet network (Singhanetra, 2008).

Secondly, there was a relationship between consumerism and the process that had transformed the gay student's sex life into the commodity as demanded by the market. This research uncovered the phenomenon involving consumer society that emphasized materialistic, not mental exchange. Uncommitted sexual acts between the adolescent and the customer had created a new kind of value that worshiped large sums of easy money without

moral regard. Subsequently, the Thai gay society had evolved on the basis of the entertainment establishments that entailed a one-night stand, similar to the study of Mutchler (2000). In that research, the process of finding adolescent and working-age gay sexual partners was examined. Mutchler pointed out that the gay lifestyle involved a temporary relationship that was uncommitted and did not last long because of the lack of a suitable venue. In the Thai context, however, the investor had set up the spa as the venue for the temporary sale of sex services to replace the process of finding one's "partner" at a public park, public toilet, or on the beachfront. Nevertheless, the entertainment establishment did not make these gays promiscuous nor did it make them think that sexual relations were more important than their state of mind. Rather, it encouraged them to present themselves and their emotions openly. However, there is no denying that the spa investors have taken advantage of their gay masseurs when they use their sexual relations as a business tool to make profits. At the same time, the gay students use such avenues to earn a living and pay for their education.

At present, the gay students have become a business tool for the spa investors who tout them as a commodity that had been increasingly popular among their gay customers. Therefore, the gay students must be of the right mind and be able to differentiate between right from wrong so that they do not fall prey to such unscrupulous business practices.

4. Attitude on occupation and the approach to solve the problem

4.1 Gay student's attitude to working as a masseur in a gay spa

Whenever "gay spa" was mentioned, a negative reaction usually followed due to the societal bias that such a place had a link to the sale of sex services similar to the massage parlors in the 1960's and 1970's. Such service required the use of one's body to earn money that is needed to survive in society, as indicated by the following interviews.

“... the main point is that this job pays well. It's not hard work. One can use one's features, especially the face, the massage that would rouse sexual emotions together with sweet words. But the negative side is that the good money only lasts when one is young. When one gets older, there will be fewer and fewer customers. . .” (Base).

“... this is a job that creates happiness for the customers and relaxation from a hard day's work or other demanding activities. Although people usually think of this occupation as a “bad” one because we are Buddhists and this job is against moral standards. But this job can earn a person good money that could pay for his living and studying without having to ask the family. . .” (Rugby).

Gays are a part of society and some do participate in such services to make a living. Within the complex fabric of society, gays have been seen as a new and distinct group with their own culture. The image of gays was that of a prostitute who had been labeled “queer”. What happened to the gay students under study was not far from that image, leading to lower self-esteem (Tinnakul, 2001). Society has even branded young gays as being spoiled by their parents, having various family problems, lacking people or things to depend on, and lacking living skills. As a result, they had adopted “bad behavior”: enjoying the night life, drinking, using expensive brand-name goods, and being a fashion addict. Sometimes they were persuaded by their friends or agents to enter the sex trade. When they were familiar with it, some might turn into an agent who would coax other friends to follow in their footsteps because of a good commission from the spa. Moreover, socio-economic growth has led to cultural and attitudinal changes. Adolescents incorrectly thought that only money could bring happiness and had blindly followed their friends into the materialistic world. It could be argued that their friends' influence coupled with the wide-open communication, accelerated by the access through the Internet, had lured the gay students into

prostitution willingly and readily while the resultant problems were very difficult to solve.

The attitude of the gay students under study was influenced by their background, economic factors (money problems, physical capital, and decision-making), and social factors (adolescent development, friend's and family's influence, and communication and mass communication). Such factors concurred with the research conducted by Ekiem (1989) establishing the four stages through which homosexuals could maintain their identity: differentiation from the others, separation of feelings and actions from identity, coming out of the closet, and maintaining the identity. The gay students under study tended to see themselves as a minority that was abnormal and shunned by society. Consequently, they had to live within the small world of homosexuals with particular norms, values, and livelihoods for the members to adhere to. The gay spa had turned into their meeting point as well as a place with sex services on the side. It was an important link in communication, interaction, cultural transmission, and a place where gay students could make extra money that suited their attitude.

4.2 Attitude toward problem solving of gay students who worked as masseurs in gay spa

Today's economy is in a recession with higher inflation. Families earn the same amount of money but their expenses keep increasing, making it necessary to make more money for their everyday lives (Tinnakul, 2001). Some families could not earn enough to maintain their lifestyle and ended up with serious family problems and even prostitution among the adolescents. Moreover, Thai youths have adopted “wrong” values plus their own needs for money to spend arrogantly for their comfortable lifestyle. They are very materialistic and have grown attached to using brand-name goods just to show off among friends that has led to the struggle for such items, as reflected by the following.

“... The first family problem is when the family has money problems in the first place. This

could subsequently lead to more money problems for the dependents. Life's problem is not something that one can choose to have or not to have because we all have different opportunities to choose from. Different family background and education can lead to a different career path and jobs. . ." (Ball).

" . . . I have to pay for my own expenses since I am materialistic and have grown attached to all things with brand names. It is necessary for me to find a good paying job to be able to afford those brand name items. I am proud to be able to work as a masseur even though society looks down on me. But the fact is I can earn my own living without having to ask anyone. . ." (Bat).

The gay students in the study wished that they could tell their family, civil society, and relevant agencies of the following solutions to their

problems.

1) Families should instill in their children the appropriate bearing and how to spend money wisely so that they do not develop serious financial problems that would push them into selling sex services in gay spas.

2) Society should perceive masseurs as having skills in their own profession since they could make their living without having to ask for money for their education and future career.

3) The public sector should regulate fair wages for masseurs. Private and/or public agencies should also be involved in the organization of massage service in spas.

The above research results are summarized in Figure 1.

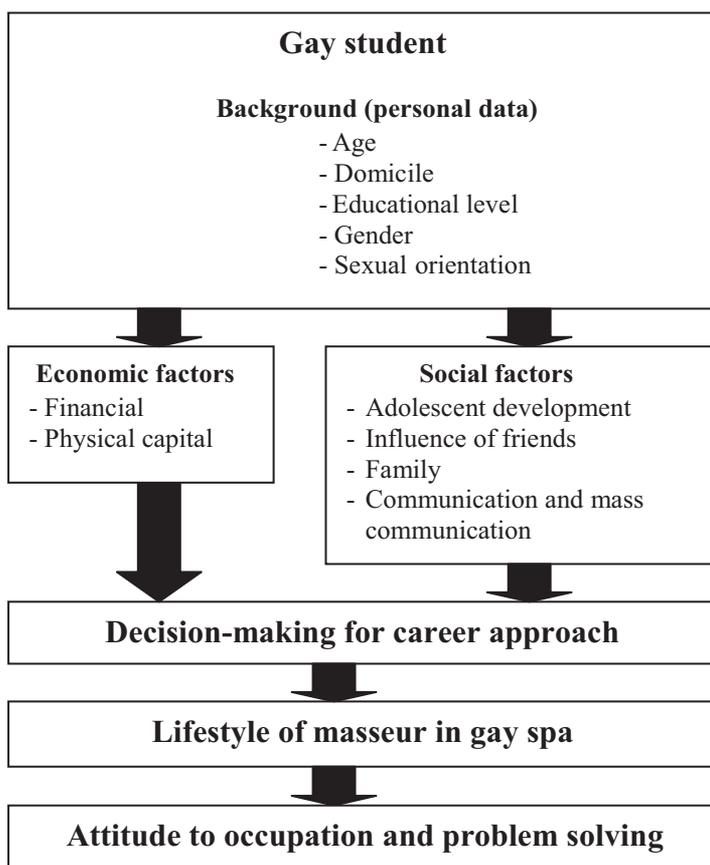


Figure 1 Decision-making process for gay students to become masseurs

RECOMMENDATION

This research clearly identified the problem of gay students who worked as masseurs in a gay spa and offered sex services on the side was a social one that should be ameliorated with cooperation from various parties. The recommendations are:

1. The public sector should strictly control the media in the transmission, illustration of or advertisement about the establishments that offer the sale of sex services that could be easily seen by adolescents. It should also prevent subsequent problems and should strictly regulate such establishments with regular monitoring of sanitary working conditions as well as fair pay for the masseurs.

2. Society should be more open-minded about the third sex or sexual diversity since a person cannot select how he or she should be born but everyone has a choice to do good deeds. Therefore, society should be more considerate toward fellow human beings, how they feel, and their apparent capability because we all have our own ability, rights and freedom to live in society equally.

3. The family should drill their members about rights and wrongs, appropriate behavior and bearing in society, and how money should be spent wisely. Moreover, it is important to make family members aware that to be a good person, one must not necessarily be male or female. Gays can be a good member of society to the same extent as anybody else. One cannot choose to be born gay, but one can choose to be a good member of society.

4. Educational institutions, teachers, and lecturers should appropriately instruct adolescents with suitable developmental activity so that they can grow up and lead a normal life.

5. The adolescent gay student is a key factor in the solution that should be given an appropriate bearing in society. The most important thing for these students is to be studious and behave according to their age. Their family members should accept their gender, whether they are bisexual, king,

queen, or both. The gay students should lead their lives happily. Once they accept their own gender, society, their family, friends, and other people will give them chances as well as acceptance.

Recommendation for further study

1. Further study on gay students working as masseurs in gay spas should consider their ages, gender, and sexual orientation. Research results could be utilized as guidelines to solve the problems stemming from the sale of sex services in the future. A comparative study could be conducted among gay masseurs in other provinces, covering the approach to the occupation and the resulting behavior to identify service areas in various regions of Thailand and to increase the penalty for the establishment of businesses that have hidden sale of sex services.

2. The influence and role of the public sector that can affect the control and regulation of various establishments could be studied along with the influence of mass media, especially the Internet and magazine advertisements, so that they do not misleadingly attract gay students.

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