

Abstract

Over the past seven years, the Butterfly Longitudinal Research (BLR) Project has followed 23 male survivors of trafficking through their experiences in aftercare, community reintegration, and beyond. Using these three analytical phases, this paper explores the cohort's relationship with major themes of violence experienced, mobility levels, and issues associated with poverty. During aftercare, peer-to-peer violence is a notable theme with all but one male (95%, n=19) indicating at least some level of violence along with a majority indicating a lack of trusting relationships. As respondents are reintegrated back into their communities, significant struggles with poverty and emotional violence from parents and carers are described by the majority of males, with nearly all respondents mentioning some level of emotional violence. As time progresses, the cohort describes more positive peer relationships, fewer feelings of shame, and more trusting relationships. Despite this, the majority still describe mounting struggles with poverty, pressure to support their families, and indication of increasingly poor emotional health. Merging the limited data within the male cohort with field notes, anecdotal data, and careful analysis, this paper hopes to provide an important baseline of information on the more silent gender in the BLR cohort and provide a stronger foundation for future analysis as well as recommendations for understanding and working with male survivors.

Methods

The BLR Project has used a mixed method approach over the past six years.¹ The research team has used survey tools, which combined asking both closed and open-ended questions. The team has also utilized a number of qualitative data collecting activities such as focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, informal interviews, play, art projects and participant observation. To continue collecting information on participants that migrate (e.g. Thailand) or move to inaccessible locations in Cambodia, the team has conducted phone interviews. The mixed method approach has allowed the BLR Project research team to establish a broad overview of participants' lives. A key advantage of longitudinal research is that it allows for greater trust and rapport to be built with respondents over time. As a result, stories become deeper and more nuanced as respondents share parts of their life that they may not have previously disclosed in a one-off interview.

In year five of this longitudinal project, the methodology shifted to a much more qualitative approach and focused more on producing thematic papers, exploring particular aspects of the respondents lives. The team felt that such a focus was more appropriate for capturing the nuances and intricacy of the respondents individual lives. It was at this point that the team conducted a baseline case study analysis on each participant, compiling four-plus years of quantitative and qualitative data to document² what is known, contradictory, and missing from each participant's story. The case study analyses resulted in detailed narrative summary data for each participant in the BLR Project. While these narratives revealed a great deal of data, they also revealed a number of gaps—particularly within the male cohort— indicating the need for deeper exploration into their narratives and contextual data.

¹ See: Miles and Miles 2010; Miles and Miles 2011; Miles et al. 2012; Miles et al. 2013, Miles et al. 2014

² Miles, et al. 2014

Assessment Sample

The present paper draws from a particular subset of participants within the larger sampling of data collected in the BLR project, exploring data gathered from male respondents over the past seven years. The analysis looks at the individual progression of each of the 22 members of the male cohort through their reintegration processes, provides an overview of themes, and attempts to place this data in the context of the larger BLR dataset as a whole.

Males within the BLR project comprise about 20% of the total sampling. In comparison with female respondent in the BLR Project, males are younger and tend to be a more homogenous group in terms of age, marital status, and reintegration.

Males:

- At the beginning of the project, ages ranged 7 years, the youngest being 10 and the oldest being 17 years of age
- All were in the same RPC program in 2011 (the only male program in Cambodia) and all began their reintegration process within the same two-year window (2012-2014).
- All male respondents have remained unmarried

Females:

- At the beginning of the project, ages ranged 29 years the youngest being 7 and the oldest being 36 years of age.
- Female respondents were spread across three different RPC programs in 2011, when the BLR project began.
- Members of the female cohort represent a diversity of backgrounds and marital statuses.

Thematic Assessment Methods

This paper takes into account the individual narratives of the male cohort over the past six years, along with what we know (both anecdotally and otherwise) about their social contexts and merged this information with the collective observations of the BLR project team. Further, since all members of the male cohort were a part of the same shelter / community (re-) integration (RPC) program, each reintegration narrative was similar enough for the longitudinal data to be divided into three subsequent phases: Aftercare, Reintegration³, and Life Beyond. While the amount of time spent in each of these subsequent phases varies from case to case, respondents spent slightly more than two years in each phases, on average.

After compiling the narratives, field notes, and anecdotal data from the research team, we conducted a thematic analysis of the cohorts vulnerabilities and resiliencies over each of the three reintegration phases. This required conducting a systematic review of the full compilation of narratives, field notes, and anecdotal information on the male cohort, and pinpointing key themes or patterns in the data.

³ It should be noted that 'reintegration' here refers to the 2-year period of formal reintegration support from the RPC program. The BLR team understands reintegration to be complex and broader term which, in reality, encompasses both aftercare and reintegration phases of their analysis.

Results

Aftercare

Respondent's ages upon entering the BLR project ranged from 10-17 years of age with an average age of 13.4 years. The time spent in aftercare varied from case to case with some aftercare experiences lasting longer due to pending court cases and family poverty issues, which made earlier reintegration potentially unsafe. On average, the BLR project tracked children for slightly less than 2 years (1.83 years) in aftercare, the shortest amount of time being less than one year, and the longest being 4 years.

While a number of broad themes are notable among males during their time in aftercare, peer-to-peer violence stands out most notably. In particular, high levels of both physical and emotional violence from peers are strongly notable in a majority of cases with all but one male (95%, n=19) indicating at least some level of emotional and/or physical violence from their peers while in aftercare. Further, respondents seem to indicate a lack of trusting relationships, in general, within the aftercare facility.

Physical Violence

Numerous accounts of physical violence from peers are described by a majority of boys (68% or 13 of 19) during their time in aftercare. Among this majority, some boys seem to be more strongly affected and describe physical violence from peers as a constant reality of their time spent in aftercare. In a modest majority of cases (58% or 11 of 19), boys cite being violent toward their peers in the aftercare facility. Qualitative data from 2011-2013 seems to indicate a social hierarchy or power structure among boys in aftercare. Age and the length of time spent in aftercare seems to merit some boys greater social capital⁴, and thus they are able to assert more authority over their peers. For some boys, having accrued social capital seems to afford them protection from violence, while among others it seems to give merit to the violence that they express toward their peers in the shelter.

Emotional Violence / Lack of trusting relationships

A strong majority of respondents (79% or 15 of 19) cite various forms of emotional violence that they experienced during their time in aftercare. In particular, this was seen in the form of discrimination and/or feeling disconnected from peers (68% or 13 of 19), discrimination and/or feeling disconnected from caretakers (26% or 5 of 19), as well as an expressed lack of trust in others, which was mentioned in 21% (4 of 19). For many respondents, emotional and physical violence are often tied together as a part of being bullied by other peers living with them in the aftercare facility. In many cases, ethnicity and socioeconomic status are cited as major reasons why boys become targets for violence from their peers.

Among the 13 boys (68%) who cite disconnect from peers within the aftercare facility, six cite that this is due to experiences of physical violence. Slightly more than one fourth (26% or 5 of 19) cite feeling disconnected from peers due to various forms of discrimination. In two cases, the discrimination is due to having a Vietnamese heritage, which is commonly looked down upon in many rural Khmer

⁴ Social capital is made up by the networks and relationships that are formed among people within a particular society, which allows them to function effectively. These relationships are often marked by trust, cooperation, and reciprocity.

communities. In other cases, discrimination is said to be due to the respondent coming from a poor family or having certain physical features, such as curly hair or a cleft palate.

Emotional unrest about family poverty

While emotional anxiety about family debts and poverty is notable between both male and female respondents. Nearly half of males (47% or 9 of 19) felt the effects of poverty in one way or another, with nearly a third of the total group (32% or 6 of 19) citing anxiety or emotional unrest regarding their parents finances. Respondents also mentioned experiencing discrimination because of their families' poverty, and their inability to be reintegrated due to the financial burden of the child on the family. Poverty seems to be a significant challenge for the majority of respondents and some indicate a strong sense of responsibility to help their families to alleviate it.

Reintegration

Upon beginning their community reintegration, the ages of respondents ranged from 12-19 years of age with an average age of 15.2 years. Financial support from the RPC program is intended to last for two years after leaving the aftercare facility. On average, respondents spent slightly more than two years (2.2 years) under RPC support, the shortest reintegration period was less than one year, and the longest was three years. As respondents begin to reintegrate into their communities, negative changes are almost immediately notable to respondents' struggles with poverty, disclosures of emotional and physical violence, difficulties in work and school, and instabilities in housing / frequencies of migration.

Poverty

A strong majority of respondents (79%) cite feeling the effects of poverty in a variety of ways as they are reintegrated back to their communities⁵. Among the 79%, one-in-five describe lacking food, nearly half (47%) cite having insufficient education for gainful employment, and nearly a third (32%) cite an inability to live with their immediate families due to poverty. Poverty seems to be an underlying issue within most of the vulnerabilities described during their RPC program. This prevents many respondents from continuing education and becomes the source of emotional and physical violence in many cases. In some cases, this drives parents to migrate for work in Thailand, leaving respondents with inconsistent support.

Emotional and Physical Violence

There is a notable increase in experiences of emotional violence as respondents are reintegrated back into their communities. Disclosures of emotional violence increase moderately from 79% (in aftercare) to nearly all respondents (95%) with 18 of the 19 mentioning some emotional violence. While disclosure of emotional violence remains high, it is notable that the source of the violence shifts from peers to experiences of violence from family members. Violence from parents and carers increases significantly (from 0% to 21%) and disclosures of emotional violence from peers decreases by more than half (from 68% to 32%) during the reintegration phase of the analysis.

⁵ This is a notable increase from 47% in aftercare who cited feeling a variety of effects of poverty.

Violence from Families and/or Caretakers

Violence from families seem to be, in part, tied to poverty. While interviewers do not collect regular data on family incomes, the research team anecdotally cites the male cohort and their families to have significantly greater struggles with poverty in comparison with the female cohort and their families. These stressors seem to provide the context in which most emotional violence occurs, as increased financial strain seems to pressure some respondents to start earning for their families' livelihoods—often causing them to stop their studies early.

Physical violence from parents and/or caretakers is commonly cited among the male cohort. One-in-five respondents (21%) stated that they have experienced violence from their parents/caregivers during this time. One respondent frequently mentions during his reintegration interviews that he is commonly beaten and insulted by his grandfather when his work is slower than his grandfather wishes. Other times, he cites being beaten for his desire to remain in formal education instead of entering vocational training and working, as his grandfather wishes. Further, 32% of boys (or 6 of 19) cite families not wanting them to be reintegrated. The majority was due to the lack of means to support education and livelihoods of their children.

From peers and community members

Emotional violence from peers is also commonly disclosed by the male cohort. This is particularly seen as various forms of stigma and discrimination experienced within their communities. Nearly a third of boys describe feeling disconnected from or discriminated by their peers during their reintegration process. The majority involve being bullied by friends or other peers. This is a common feeling disclosed in interviews, with one-in five respondents citing shame or fear of stigmatization during their reintegration period.

In contrast to the increase in emotional violence, experiences of physical violence decreases slightly during community reintegration (from 68% to 53%), as boys are removed from the high levels of peer-to-peer violence which was commonly experienced in aftercare. While overall disclosures of physical violence seem to decrease as respondents are reintegrated, it was observed that the source of physical violence shifts from peer-on-peer to parent/caregiver-on-child.

Shame and Lack of Trusting Relationships

More than one-in-five respondents (21%) cite feelings of shame as they are reintegrated back into their communities, something which was not previously mentioned during their time in aftercare. This is potentially due to the fact that, while in aftercare, respondents were living with other boys who had shared a similar experience of trafficking and/or exploitation. In communities, respondents may have begun to feel that they were different from their peers. These feelings would be, no doubt, exacerbated by the sharp increase in stigma and discrimination cited by respondents upon community reintegration. In addition to feelings of shame, more than one in four (26%) describe a lack of trusting relationships within their communities. One 16 year old cites being fearful of being looked down upon when his

peers ask him why he had to spend time in the shelter. He cites, "I do not trust or believe anybody because I noticed that when I share my story to others, they often share it to other [people]".

Difficulties in Work and School

As the boys are reintegrated back into their communities, eight boys, or 42%, cite a variety of difficulties in maintaining their work or studies. Further, nearly one-in-three (32%) cite quitting their work or studies entirely. Familial poverty seems to drive the majority of these difficulties, pressuring boys to quit school and pursue ways of generating income to support their family's basic needs. One respondent cites his grandfather forced him to stop his studies describing that his grandfather does not believe in the importance of school and preferring the boys to take vocational training, which can earn money faster. When RPC funding came to an end, the boy stopped school altogether, citing "*...I stopped my schooling because I had no support for my studies anymore. So, I need to learn repairing skill with my uncle, even though I don't like it*". Lack of family support also seems to be a key issue preventing males from completing studies, as well as vocational training programs.

Housing Instability

The majority of male cohort (68% or 13) demonstrates significant housing instabilities during their reintegration. Among this group instabilities seem to come from a number of factors including: migration for work (cited by 32%), migration due to violence at home (cited by 26%), as well as other reasons including: avoiding an exploiter who still lived in the community, international migration of a parent, migration due to a parent's incarceration and/or release from prison, and migration for education.

Life Beyond

As respondents reach the end of the two-year formal reintegration support from the RPC program, social relationships seem to moderately improve overall. The cohort describes somewhat more positive relationships with peers, fewer describe feelings of shame, and fewer describe relationships lacking in trust. Despite these moderate improvements, the majority still indicate significant struggles with poverty, there is increasing pressure from families to earn income to support their needs, increasing difficulties in maintaining work and/or continuing school, and the majority indicate struggling with poor emotional health.

Continuing struggles with poverty

A strong majority, 75% or 12, describe struggles with economic stability, with more than a third (38% or 6) citing anxiety about being able to support themselves and their families. Further, 38% (6) cite a lack of access to regular meals, an increase of 18% (2) from what was described during the respondent's reintegration periods. One-in-four (25% or 4) cite being unable to complete education because of their struggles with poverty. And half of respondents (8) cite having to be separated from their families as a result of such economic pressures, which is an 18% increase (2) from the respondents' reintegration periods. This separation is due to parents or caretakers having to migrate for work or respondents having to migrate to distant provinces due to lack of local employment opportunities. This either involves the respondents leaving the family in search of employment, or for younger boys, the parents leaving them in the province as they migrate for work elsewhere.

Increasing antagonism with families and carers

A number of respondents describe antagonistic relationships between them and their parents, caretakers, and/or other family members. This is largely seen among those respondents who already have had histories of significant emotional violence within their families. Half of the male cohort (8 of 16) describe discrimination or other forms of emotional disconnect from parents and/or caretakers—and in three cases, discrimination as a result of the boy's experience of abuse. Some of this disconnect seems to stem from pressure from parents/caretakers to earn money to support their families, particularly as time progresses and respondents become older. The BLR project team notes that, as time progresses, more and more interview time is spent discussing these devolving familial relationships and their feelings associated with them.

Additionally, some antagonism from parents/carers seems to stem from previously violent or tumultuous family relationships. For instance, a respondent describes an uneasy family context in which he and his brother were sold by their estranged father. He cites, "*...He sold us to someone else and my mother sold her jewelry to take us back. My mother became poor because of him.*" The respondent cites that his regular interviews with the BLR team is only time that he feels that he is able to express himself. In future interviews, the BLR team hopes to unpack this story further as the respondent feels comfortable to do so.

Increasing Difficulties in Work / School

As respondents' two-year RPC program come to an end, difficulties in work and school exponentially increase from 32% to 69% (11/16) of respondents citing such difficulties. More than a third (38% or 6) describe a lack of ambition to continue their work or schooling and nearly one third (31% or 5) have quit school or work altogether.

In a majority of these, family support seems to be considerably lacking. In many cases, respondents are left living on their own, or moving between houses. Other difficulties are due to pressures from parents or caretakers to generate immediate income, forcing respondents to take up careers or vocational training programs in area of work in which they have no interest. Lastly, some difficulties seem to be rooted in emotional health, leading to combativeness with employers, depression, and/or general lack of ambition, which will be discussed in the following section.

Poor emotional health

While no specific or diagnostic questions on emotional health were asked during interviews, it is nevertheless notable that nearly half of male respondents (8) seem to demonstrate a decline in emotional health as time progresses. This trend manifests in a variety of ways, including: low self-esteem, severe anxiety, anger/combativeness at home and work, isolation from family and/or peers, and suicidal thoughts.

Field notes from a series of interviews with one respondent indicate potential unresolved trauma in relation to his case of sexual exploitation (nearly 7 years later). These notes express the respondent has persistent anxiety about people in his community finding out about what happened to him. The participant also notes that he is often unwilling to visit his hometown because of the fact that the people from his village know about his abuse case.

Another respondent, age 19 in 2015, cites significant trouble maintaining stable employment due to persistent anger and combativeness with his employers. The respondent also describes regular physical and emotional violence during his time in aftercare, due in part to a physical disability that makes it difficult for him to walk.

Discussion

Throughout the three analytical phases of this paper, data has indicated a notable pattern of violence—particularly emotional violence—among the male cohort. In many cases, this violence takes place within a context of antagonistic family relationships and loose social connections and increasingly pressure to earn money to support their families. It is possible that some of this reality may come from rigid gender norms or culturally-imbued expectations for males, perhaps especially with regard to their emotions.

Lack of emotional support

A lack of trusting relationships and a seeming inability to express emotions is a theme that appears within many interviews. This is illustrated clearly above with the respondent struggling to maintain stable employment due to persistent anger and combativeness with his employers. However, despite this respondent's seemingly calloused and often combative exterior, the BLR project team notes that he is often one of the most consistent and dedicated respondents in the male cohort, often calling team members preemptively when he learns the team is on field work, simply to verify that he will be visited and not be forgotten. This is not a unique phenomenon. Other respondents also cite looking forward to interviews, as well; some describe them as rare opportunities in which they have the freedom to express how they think and feel. One respondent, on numerous occasions, notes that his interviews are the only times in which he feels that he can express himself and talk about his life and cites: "...in my daily life I would not dare to talk to anyone about these things."

During regular interviews, the BLR team conducts individualized and confidential meetings, with active and attentive listening as the primary goal. The research team strives to provide a safe space, in which the boy's thoughts and emotions can be validated as real and important. This kind of space seems to be starkly contrasted to the kind of environment that many of the male cohort live in from day-to-day. In this context, the potential therapeutic impact of the rapport that has been built between the male cohort and the BLR team and the empathy and unconditional positive regard⁶ that they provide should be considered. For a number of respondents, their interviews seem to be a much-needed space where they are able to express pent-up emotions—something that seems to be especially true as time progresses through the reintegration process.

This recommendation for relationship consistency is also extended to RPC programs themselves. The BLR Team notes that a large majority of this male cohort has had experiences that make them question

⁶ Unconditional positive regard is a concept within client-centered therapy, developed by Carl Rogers, which provides unconditional acceptance and support of a client, regardless of what that person says or does. (See: Rogers, Carl R. *Client-centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications and Theory*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951.)

the trust they have for their RPC program due to broken promises, loss of contact, lack of individual time with the RPC program staff, and/or lack of confidentiality for the client's situation.

Filial Piety

In comparison with the female cohort, the BLR project team notes that the male cohort is much younger and seems to come from a background of significantly higher poverty, which can increase anxieties to help provide for their families' needs. Previous thematic research in the BLR project cites more pressure among the female cohort to be "good daughters," and "good women", in comparison with the male cohort, who do not seem to feel as much responsibility to pay their parents' debt (Smith-Brake et. al, 2015). While this is true in comparison the two cohort, however, it does not take into account that the average age of the male cohort is about five years younger than females. At such young ages, males may feel less responsible to pay their family's debts. This paper finds that, as respondents become older, male do indicate feeling pressure to earn money to support their families—sometimes even to an unhealthy extent, with one respondent describing anxiety to the point of contemplating suicide. This may indicate that much more lies beneath the surface, which interviews have not yet been able to draw out.

Navigating Rigid Gender Norms

Many members of the male cohort are described as stoic or silent during their interviews, often lacking expression in conversations about how they think and feel. The BLR team describes the male cohort as feeling that they need to act tough and avoid the expression of any strong feelings. This is similar to what was found in a 2008 study on the sexual abuse of Cambodian boys. The study cites, "team discussions and later comments confirmed that boys are not expected to cry, but be strong, solve their own problems and 'act like a man' from an early age",⁷ indicating a powerful expectation to be strong, and navigate poverty to be able to support their families.

This phenomenon among males has been well documented among qualitative researchers (Affleck, et al., 2012; Duncombe & Marsden, 1993). Some research in the field of psychology understands this phenomenon to be a part gender role socialization (Levant, 2003). This holds that male emotional expression is often suppressed throughout childhood, thus boys commonly lacks vocabulary for expressing their emotions (Affleck, et al., 2012). By contrast, females are more commonly asked about their feelings and expected to take on a nurturing role in families, thus developing a greater capacity for emotional expression. This may be especially needed among those who are survivors of sexual violence, as the identity of "victim" (a term which the BLR project does not use) may be felt to be in conflict with the social identities and cultural expectations of masculinity within Cambodian culture.

It is important that such cultural realities are taken into consideration in the development of methodological approaches to male respondents. For instance, in qualitative research, semi-structured or 'open-ended' questioning has become an essential part of researcher practice for most qualitative researchers. This kind of long-form interview is often thought to be a key part of researching vulnerable populations (Affleck, et al., 2012), as it gives respondents the freedom and space to communicate their thoughts and feelings. However, given male identity and gender norms, asking emotionally sensitive

⁷ Hilton, et al. (2008)

questions can challenge the ways that some males have been socialized to behave, making them feel emotionally vulnerable and causing them to avoid conversation (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2002).

Compound Traumas

Alongside of the needed recovery and reintegration associated with their individual cases of exploitation, an overwhelming of the male cohort also have other severe and compounded traumas, including: Death of immediate family members, physical disability, and family breakdown. While RPC programming generally provides counseling and other forms support to deal with specific cases of exploitation and violence, it largely focuses on poverty alleviation. This may neglect numerous traumas and the complex emotional needs of male survivors of various forms of violence. In addition, the BLR team notes that providing a safe and smooth integration into an aftercare program is often a challenge for the staff and house parents of aftercare facilities. In view of this, and based on the findings of this report, there may be a strong need for the development and diversification of male-specific social services.

Recommendations

Program / Practitioner Recommendations:

It is important for RPC programs to invest into the development of male-specific emotional support systems to overcome these assumptions, including counseling and program follow up. This could include positive community-based mentor relationships for males, with the goal of creating a regular and sustainable safe space to work through their various emotions and experiences with a conscientious and trustworthy adult.

Given the apparent isolation and instabilities within family and community relationships, it is important for aftercare and reintegration services to spend more time working with families and carers on how they can better care for and understand the needs of male survivors of abuse and exploitation.

Further, as a means of developing better and more survivor-centered programming, RPC programs should allow survivors to have a greater involvement in the development of social programming to meet their needs.

Recommendations for future research:

Future research should look at how the respondents and their families understand the 'impact of the 'case' on the child and explore the role of gender identity within this phenomenon. It would also be helpful to specifically explore individual and cultural perceptions and expectations of gender among male and female survivors of sexual exploitation. Perhaps such research could ask specific gender questions such as: "What do you think a good man looks like? What do you think a good man does? Why is this important?"

Additionally, future research methods should explore ways of overcoming the lack of emotional expression among the male cohort such as arts therapy and visual storytelling. These methods can help to make the respondent feel more powerful and in control of the situation, thus lessening his feelings of vulnerability and encouraging dialogue.

In addition, further research should provide a demographically similar sampling across gender groups to provide a more helpful comparison in future thematic papers. Presently male in the BLR project are all of similar ages and come from similar reintegration

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