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# The Case in Thailand



Casey Walker  
Global Breakthrough  
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*This publication compiles research on slavery and human trafficking gathered over the last few years, focused specifically on Thailand.*

*If you would like to clarify some of the definitions of the terms used in this document, such as “slavery”, “trafficking”, “human trafficking”, and “modern day slavery”, please download the [Research for Human Trafficking](#).*

## Stats

There are half a million to a million prostitutes in Thailand, one in twenty of them are enslaved

Source: 1

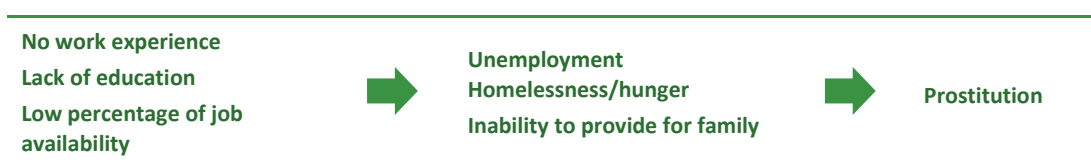
## Trafficking and Sex Slavery

Thousands of women and girls are kidnapped or deceived into being sold to brothels every year in Thailand. They are regularly beaten, raped, and held by threat of torture and death. Upon arrival they most often assume a debt to their owner set by the cost of housing, food, medical services, etc. that they will likely never be able to pay off. The majority of them are trafficked from the neighboring countries Cambodia, Laos, and Burma. Internal trafficking also occurs, though in smaller numbers, where women and girls most commonly from the Northern region are transported and sold into city brothels.

## Forced Prostitution

As seen in the statistic above, only one out of twenty women and girls in prostitution can be categorized as slaves. So what is the story behind the rest of the prostitutes? For the large majority of sex workers in Thailand, they are forced into work not by physical force, but by economic destitution.

The Isaan region of the North is the poorest area of Thailand. Only 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the land is useable for agriculture, and that portion is largely owned and controlled by the rich, leaving the majority of the people with no source of stable income. Women will willingly leave their families behind to head to the cities to look for work. Many go with the idea that they will work in a restaurant, or a factory. However, for the majority, a combination of circumstances charted below reveals the economic forcefulness of their involvement in the sex industry.



For others, they know when they leave their village that they will work as a prostitute, hoping, along with her family that she will marry a rich foreigner who will support both herself and her family. It should also be noted that the majority of women do not work in brothels but in bars. In the city of Pattaya alone there are an estimated 800 bars each with 40-60 female workers. The most common found characteristics for these women: they are from the North, they are supporting their family, and they want out.

## Laws

Prostitution in Thailand is illegal. Yet in cities like Pattaya, the only policemen to be found on Walking Street (where prostitutes work) are called the Tourist Police. These policemen are unfortunately only interested in the safety and protection of foreigners. Occasionally the police perform raids on brothels; however this is generally more for show than to seriously crack down on the industry. Though certain laws have been set in place such as the Anti-Trafficking Law, the Prostitution Suppression Act, etc. these hold little weight while government corruption continues to persist.

There are two major factors that play into the weakness of regulation. The first is that the willingness by government officials to protect police from losing their bribes outweighs the conviction to enforce laws of protection for women. The second is that slaveholders amount such a wealth of income that they can buy political power.

Source: 1

## Cultural Reasons

### Statistics

- Between 80 and 87 percent of Thai men have had sex with a prostitute
- Up to 90 percent report that their first sexual experience was with a prostitute
- Somewhere between 10 and 40 percent of married men paid for commercial sex within the past twelve months, as have up to 50 percent of single men.
- There are an estimated 3 to 5 million regular Thai customers for commercial sex

What many Thai men consider normal and casual entertainment largely contributes to the success of brothels and bars. Paying for sex is not considered shameful; in fact it plays an integral role in many business negotiations. Thai culture has a continual demand for women, and they are viewed and treated as products to be freely used, enjoyed, abused, and profited off of.

Women are also seen as products in a different light. Modernization across the country has created a high demand for consumer goods and a low value on human lives (or rather, *female* lives). Daughters are now regularly sold in order to make a large purchase. Kevin Bales writes, "A recent survey in the northern provinces found that of the families who sold their daughters, two-thirds could afford not to do so but instead preferred to buy color televisions and video equipment." With new products being produced daily, daughters are increasingly seen as a smart "trade in."

Source: 1

## Solutions

### What We Do About It

Global Breakthrough takes a two-part approach to the problem of trafficking:

1. **Rescue Center:** This center takes in girls desiring to leave the sex industry, and makes contact with girls before they are pulled into the sex trade. Our center offers food, shelter, counseling, vocational skills, and job placement services. We have a center running in Pattaya with more on the way.
2. **Business Centers:** These centers focus on teaching practical business skills to nationals as well as providing coaching and mentoring as they embark on their new journey towards economic stability. These centers will be available to those who have been pulled off the streets and rescued from the trafficking world as well as to those just arriving in town desperately in search of economic stability. More information on the business centers can be found in our [Economic Empowerment page](#).

## Works Cited

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