PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE ON THE CONDITIONS OF WOMEN WORKING IN THE THAI MASSAGE INDUSTRY IN MALMÖ

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2019, Noomi – Hela Människan i Malmö commissioned a study to gain an overview of the current situation for Thai women in the Thai massage industry, identify any service gaps or needs, and assess the possibility of expanding its work with Thai women working in this sector.

Noomi supports women who are exposed to violence, with a focus on those who have been engaged in prostitution or are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. In 2017, Noomi established a shelter for women in need and conducted outreach to Thai massage parlors to provide information and support. The organization is looking to expand its work to support a larger group of Thai women in the Thai massage industry in Malmö. The outcome of this study will be used to design the next phase of the project.

The study was guided by three main assessment questions that concerned the industry, the women and the public.

The industry:

- What is the Thai Massage business model?
- How big is the prostitution and human trafficking situation in the Thai massage industry in Malmö?
- How high is the demand, who are the customers and how is this exploitation possible?

The women:

- What is the profile of women working in the Thai massage parlors?
- What are the living and working conditions for Thai women working in the massage parlors in Malmö?
- What level of knowledge do these women have about their rights to social protection, labour protection and health care?
- What barriers do they face in accessing their rights?
- What services and support do they need to improve their living and working conditions?

The public:

- What awareness and opinion do the public have toward Thai massage parlors in Malmö?

In total, 24 interviews with parlor owners and masseuses were carried out during this study. The study employed a participatory, mixed method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods.

Interviews with authorities and other key informants - A meeting with the Malmö Municipal Commissioner was held at the beginning of the field work to discuss the study and request support with data and local contacts. Interviews with representatives from many local authorities, action groups and key informants were also conducted.

Face-to-Face Public Surveys with total of 20 surveys were conducted with residents of Malmö to ascertain their level of knowledge of massage parlors in Malmo.

Key findings

This study found that the demand for massages with sexual services remains high and is primarily driven by a supply and demand economy. The women employed in this industry are working with legal status (married or permanent resident), on a tourist visa or using the marriage migration process to find employment.

The conditions for most of these women are exploitive and affect their wellbeing and place in society. Many of them must work long hours for a minimum wage which then goes to family in Thailand. The women who are married often have better living conditions but are still exploited in terms of labour and wage.

The reason for much of this exploitation centers around the women's legal status, low education, and limited Swedish language skills. They are unaware of their rights or the services that are available to them in Sweden. The working conditions and lives of these women need to be addressed. The women in this industry have reported feeling neglected by the government and improved access to government and language is an important step in changing their status in society.

Recommendations

The study identified 17 recommendations for the government and Noomi.

1. Develop an information package on Sweden in Thai for social media.
2. Develop an emergency contact list of civil society organizations that work with Thai women.
3. Provide orientation to the new arrivals from a *local authority* and guide them to enroll in an SFI course.
4. Develop a "Welcome to Sweden" handbook in Thai.
5. Local authorities could consider connecting the new arrival with Information Center.
6. Establish an Information Center operating in Thai.
7. Conduct regular outreach to the Thai massage parlors on their basic rights.
8. Develop and distribute a quarterly newsletter, both print and online.
9. Provide orientation into Swedish language classes.
10. Support their integration into society.
11. Establish a Thai reference group.
12. Assist authorities to develop and maintain a record of women working in Thai massage parlors.
13. Support the Gender Equality Agency (GEA) initiative to campaign against sex buyers to provide campaign materials to massage parlors.

14. Consider developing an advertising campaign explaining the penalties of engaging prostitutes.
15. Consider developing a human trafficking checklist to be used by inspectors who are inspecting Thai massage parlors.
16. Work with authorities and relevant non-governmental organizations to improve the working conditions of workers at Thai massage parlors.
17. Further Research on customers/buyers, fake marriage agencies and the possibility of expanding the study to other cities in Sweden.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

This preliminary assessment was commissioned by Noomi – Hela Människan I Malmö to increase awareness of the issues facing Thai women employed in the Thai massage industry. The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of the current situation of the Thai women and their living and working conditions as well as how the industry finds and employs them. It also hopes to investigate the problems or complaints these women have in accessing government services, such as language classes, social services and support. The study also includes an analysis of possible linkages between massage parlors, prostitution and human trafficking. This report seeks to describe the multifaceted experience of women employed in the Thai massage parlors in Malmö and others affected by illicit massage business trafficking.

Noomi is a local NGO based in Malmö established in 2015.[1] It is a member of an umbrella organization called Hela Människan.[2] The organization supports women who are exposed to violence, with a focus on those who have been engaged in prostitution or are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. In 2017, Noomi established a shelter for women in need and conducted outreach to Thai massage parlors to provide information and support. The pilot initiative provides support to Thai women working in five massage parlors and identified a series of issues. These range from a limited understanding of their own rights, no knowledge of how to access various government services, isolation from Swedish society, and difficulty understanding society and how things operate. Exploitation of women employed in this business has also been identified.

Noomi is looking to expand its work in order to support a larger group of Thai women in the Thai massage industry in Malmö. Noomi has recognized the need for more systematized support as well as collaboration with the local authorities, Thai women and their community. There is a need to empower them to be their own agents of change to ensure sustainability, however, they need additional support to do this.

This report aims to provide a better understanding of the situation of Thai women employed in the Thai massage industry and how this industry affects the community in Malmö. This is an area of knowledge and information that has been identified as lacking.

The outcome of this study will be used to design the next phase of the project in consultation with the Malmö municipality, counter prostitution and human trafficking actors and other relevant agencies currently working in the fields of prevention, protection and prosecution in Malmö. It is intended to be of assistance to both those working at an operational level as well

[1] http://www.noomiMalmö.se/
[2] http://helamanniskan.se/

as those working at a policy level to ensure Swedish law and society are held to the appropriate standards.

Investigating and gaining more information about possible exploitation is important to Swedish society for the following reasons:

- Exploitation in any form, happening to or done by anybody within Swedish jurisdiction is against Swedish societal values and legal framework
- Exploitative practices affect Swedish society in at least in two areas: public health and social order
- Exploitative practices will facilitate other types of social problems.

1.2 POPULATION, KEY INFORMANTS, RESPONDENTS AND SITE SELECTION

It is estimated that there are about 106 massage parlors in Malmö. The sampling and selection of study locations and targeted massage parlors began by creating a map of the locations and distribution of the massage parlors based on a combination of data sources including Google maps, online data from the ThaiMassageGuiden[3], brainstorming sessions with the key informants and a quick survey of the locations conducted by Noomi's staff member (from now on refer to as Researcher). Based on this information sample sites were selected to represent these distribution patterns/areas. Considering that there are some sensitive issues like trust, fear, as well as data privacy issues, a randomized sampling technique was not appropriate for this study. Instead the researcher applied a snowball technique, which involved asking initial respondents to help nominate other respondents who met the criteria for the study. This is important because with a reference from someone the respondents already know, the respondents could share their experience openly.

In total, 24 interviews (individual and focus group discussions) with parlor owners and masseuses were carried out in the course of this study. It engaged 27 respondents (11 parlor owners, 14 masseuses and 2 receptionists) from 13 massage parlors. It was spread over 9 geographical areas of Malmö:

- Värnhem, Gamla Väster, Triangeln
- Mollevång, Dalaplan, Grondal
- Limhamn, Solbacken, Ribersborg

These groups of respondents are sufficient to show common patterns for Thai women working in this industry as they are distributed proportionally over the geographical areas as well as the nature of the business.

The size of the business was also taken into consideration in this selection. Six larger parlors employing approximately six masseuses and seven small and medium parlors with two to four employees were selected for study. The average business size was three people (one owner and two masseuses).

[3] https://www.thaimassageguiden.se/salonger

2. STUDY APPROACH

The overarching approach of this study is to "do no harm" and focus on the victim. See section 2.6 on details for ethical considerations. The following section describes the structure and technical approach of the study.

2.1 OVERALL OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Noomi commissioned a study to gain an overview of the current situation for Thai women in the Thai massage industry, identify any service gaps or needs, and assess the possibility of expanding its work with Thai women working in this sector. The study was guided by three main assessment questions that concerned the industry, the women, and the public. Detailed operational guiding questions are available in Annex 1.

The industry:

- What is the Thai Massage business model?
- How big is the prostitution and human trafficking situation in the Thai massage industry in Malmö?
- How high is the demand, who are the customers and how is this exploitation possible?

The women:

- What is the profile of women working in the Thai massage parlors?
- What are the living and working conditions for Thai women working in the massage parlors in Malmö?
- What level of knowledge do these women have about their rights to social protection, labour protection and health care?
- What barriers do they face in accessing their rights?
- What services and support do they need to improve their living and working conditions?

The public:

- What awareness and opinion do the public have toward Thai massage parlors in Malmö?

2.2 INCEPTION PHASE

Noomi's pilot project was started in 2017 and is still at an early stage which means it is still developing contacts and establishing relationships with the masseuses and their associates. A potential challenge to the assessment was the identification of and limited access to respondents. In order to address this challenge, we conducted a desk review, met with representatives from Evonhuset, the Swedish-Thai Cultural Association, interviewed a Thai massage teacher and two parlor owners and one masseuse between 20 January to 15 February. This process provided the researcher with an overview of the Thai massage business, guided the development of the tools, mapping of massage parlors and selection of study sites and

respondents. This process was followed by the field study conducted between 21 Feb and 13 March 2019.

2.3 METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The study employed a participatory, mixed method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods comprising (1) a literature review, (2) key informant interviews, (3) face to face survey, and (4) field observation/visits to each study location involving semi-structured and focus group discussions.

2.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

During the inception phase, the researcher conducted a desk review of relevant documents, studies and available data provided by Noomi and identified through online searches of electronic databases, reference lists, websites of relevant organizations etc. The desk review helped to inform the development of the research instruments and protocol. A full list of all documents reviewed is contained in Annex 2 of this report.

2.5 FIELD WORK

The field component of the study involved field/site observations and interviews with local authorities, key informants, respondents (parlor owners and masseuses), and public. Observation is critical to this study as the questions were how or what scenarios and emphasize the importance of understanding the meaning of a setting. Through this approach, the researcher was able to observe people in their natural environment or situations.

Interviews with authorities - A meeting with the Malmö Municipal Commissioner was held at the beginning of the field work to inform her of the study and request support such as data/statistics and contacts of local authorities to be included in the study. Interviews with representatives from Evonhuset, Swedish Prosecution Authority, Gender Equality Agency, Police Detective Inspector (polisregion väst), and Miljöinspektör (Environmental Inspector). Generic guiding questions were used for interviewing local authorities in accordance with their roles and responsibilities. The questions were based on existing policies and mechanisms to support the target group.

Interviews with key informants – interviewed with representative from Swedish-Thai Cultural Association, Österlens Folkhögskola, church personnel, massage teacher, hospital personnel (food delivery staff), vendors, money lender, and beauty salon owner, were also conducted.

Semi-structured In-depth individual interview – A total of 16 semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were conducted with seven parlor owners and nine masseuses. Each interview took between one to one and a half hours. Some informants were interviewed more

than once. Most of the interviews were conducted at the massage parlors and a few were conducted at a church or restaurant.

The focus of the discussion with parlor owners was to gain an understanding of the business model, challenges they may face, plans for the business, their views of business in Malmö, their view on living and working conditions, and challenges faced by their employees (masseuses), etc. The questions also included a focus on the owners (their journey from Thailand, family situation, etc) and how they got into this industry and what challenges they are facing as individuals in Sweden.

The masseuses were asked about their journey from Thailand to working at a massage parlor in Malmö, their working and living conditions as well as their challenges in accessing government services. The Human Trafficking indicators from United Nations Action for Corporation against Trafficking in Persons (UN-ACT) were used to guide the development of interview questions which aimed to diagnose whether they fall into this category under their employment. [4]

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

1) *FGDs with masseuses and receptionists* - Three FGDs with masseuses and receptionists from three different massage parlors were conducted. The first FGD was comprised of two masseuses from the same massage parlor, the second FGD was comprised of two masseuses and receptionist from the same massage parlor and the third FGD was comprised of three masseuses and one receptionist/ moneylender from the same parlor. The questions for the FGDs were similar to those asked in the individual interviews but from a collective point of view rather than an individual perspective. Each interview took between one and three hours.

2) *FGDs with owners and masseuses* - Two FGDs with a mix of parlor owners and masseuses were conducted. The discussion with this FGD was kept quite general to avoid putting the masseuses in a difficult position with their manager.

3) *FGD with parlor owner* - One FGD with three parlor owners was conducted. These informants were the first to start massage parlors in Malmö and were already included in the individual interviews because they have a depth of knowledge, a vast network in this business sector and understand the issues facing the women. They are also very supportive of the study. This was the last interview conducted for this study and the purpose was to verify some of the data collected.

[4] http://un-act.org/publication/view/identifying-victims-trafficking-associated-forms-exploitation-common-indicators-first-responders/

Table 1: Number of Respondents and Meetings with Owner & Masseuses

Type of interview	Parlor owner	Masseuse	Total
16 x In-depth Individual interviews	7	9	16
3 x Focus Group Discussions (Masseuses & receptionist)	0	7	7
2 x Mixed Focus Group Discussions (Masseuses & Owner)	2	5	7
1 x Focus Group Discussion (Owner only)	3	0	3
	12	21	**33***

**The actual number of women engaged in this study is 27, but the total number is 33 because 6 of them attended both individual and FGDs.*

Face-to-Face Public Surveys - A total of 20 surveys were conducted with residents of Malmö. This includes 13 male and 7 female informants aged between 25 to 65. The selection of participants ensured a mix of ages and genders as well as ethnic origin i.e. Swedish-born, foreign-born person, etc. The interviews were done in both Swedish and English (depending on the informants' preference). The aim of the survey was to gain a sense of public awareness and their opinions on the issues related to a possible link between Thai massage and sexual services. The survey form can be found in Annex 3.

2.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are treated seriously and the rights of those who are sharing information are respected. The assessment instruments including information sheet, consent forms, guiding questions, and survey form were developed and implemented according to internationally recognized. Most of the interviews were planned, where the researcher phoned the respondents and set up an appointment. During the telephone conversation the researcher provided a brief introduction and explained the purpose of the interview. Prior to the actual interview the researcher verbally introduced herself and reviewed the objective of the study and presented a hard copy of the introduction letter from Noomi and an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study and the interview processes. Extra copies of these documents were available to respondents if they wished to keep them.

Initially, once respondents verbally agreed to be interviewed, the researcher handed out the consent form and asked if respondents were willing to sign. Respondents were often reluctant to sign a consent form before the interview, without knowing the researcher or the questions. As a consequence, the researcher modified her approach and gave an introduction and let the respondent know that (1) the interview was voluntary, (2) they could withdraw at any time, and (3) the information they provided during the interview would not be used unless they gave

their consent at the end of the interview. This proved to be an effective solution. The interview process allowed the participants time to get to know the researcher and understand the researcher's intentions. In the end, all interviewees agreed to, and signed the consent forms.

In terms of consent for the use of voice recording device, the researcher verbally asked the respondents for their permission to record the whole conversation (not all interviews were recorded). All voice recordings will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

The name of the respondents, massage parlors and their contact details were kept separate from the transcript and any details that could be used to identify the respondents. Any information used from the interviews will be kept anonymous.

2.7 DATA PROCESSING, ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Data from the interviews was documented using audio records and interview notes/transcript and only recorded with consent from the respondents. Answers from the respondents were collected under each question, and analysis was used to identify patterns. Primary data was then triangulated with information from the desk review. The report presents the data under section 4 and 5 which correspond to the key assessment questions.

2.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Lack of on-going research and existing hard empirical data relating to how women do or do not access such rights.
- Limited time and scope of assessment: The assessment was designed as a preliminary assessment to map the nature of the problem. The limited time of the study informed what methodologies and approaches were used to collect data as well as the scope of what could be studied and data that could be collected.
- Building trust is essential for interviewing the women, because of the limited time available for the assessment our methodology was designed in a way to garner the most amount of information without relying on individual relationships and without putting key informants and respondents in an unsafe position.
- During the study period the local authorities conducted random visits to the massage parlors, and some were shut down. This created an air of distrust and anxiety among the owners and the masseuses. The researcher was often refused entry if the visit was unplanned due to this.
- The timing of the interview proved to be a challenge. The only time to conduct interviews was during work hours, however the interview could only be conducted if they had no clients. Several times the interview was interrupted or ended because of a walk-in customer. In some cases, it was possible to continue the discussion by telephone the next day or the researcher had to return for the second part of the interview.

3. TERMS & DEFINITIONS

3.1 PROSTITUTION

According to 'Sex Purchase Act.' found in the Swedish Penal Code (1962:700) 6 chapter 11 § and reads:

"Anyone who, other than that referred to earlier in this chapter, acquires a temporary sexual service for compensation, shall be sentenced for the purchase of sexual service to a fine or imprisonment for at most one year.

What is stated in the first section applies even if the compensation has been promised or given by someone else." [5]

The proposition behind the paragraph (Prop. 2004/05:45) states that compensation refers to both financial compensation and other types of compensation, e.g. alcohol and drugs.[6]

3.2 HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The Swedish law against human trafficking is based on the UN's convention against transnational organised crime, known as the Palermo Protocol. According to the Swedish Penal Code (1962:700) 4 Chapter 1a § 1 st. and reads:

"Anyone who, otherwise than referred to in 1 §, through

1. unlawful coercion,
2. deceit,
3. exploitation of someone's vulnerable situation that severely limits the person's options, or
4. other such improper means if it severely limits the person's options
recruits, transports, transfers, houses or receives a person for the purpose of sexual exploitation, removal of organs, war services, forced labour or other activity in a situation that poses an emergency for the victim, will be sentenced for human trafficking to prison for at least two and at most ten years." [7]

3.3 HAPPY ENDING MASSAGE

There is no official definition for the term happy ending. Generally, it means a client receiving an orgasm from the masseuse at the end of a massage.

[5] SFS 1967:700. The Swedish Penal Code. Stockholm: The Department of Justice L5
[6] Regeringens proposition 2004/05:45. En ny sexualbrottslagstiftning. https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/7DB75D7B-07E2-413D-B942-69CD08A6CFD8
[7] SFS 1967:700. The Swedish Penal Code. Stockholm: The Department of Justice L5.

3.4 PROSTITUTION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

"*Prostitution and Human Trafficking are clearly intertwined and cannot be viewed as two entirely separate phenomena. Trafficking is a broader phenomenon than prostitution, but an individual can be trafficked for sexual exploitation and the two are often linked to the same crimes and involve the same actors. This interconnection is further increased with the growth of online prostitution. Parallels can be drawn between advertisements to facilitate prostitution and online recruitment of victims of trafficking."*[1] (Prostitution Policy in Sweden – Targeting Demand, 2019)

3.5 PROSTITUTION AND HAPPY ENDING MASSAGE

"*A happy ending constitutes an act of prostitution if the massage therapist renders the service in exchange of money or something else, for instance drugs, food, clothes or jewellery. All kinds of acts with a sexual purpose are covered by Chapter 6 Section 11 (purchase of sexual service) and Chapter 6 Section 12 (procuring) in the Swedish penal code, including acts with a sexual purpose which the massage therapist has to commit on herself without touching the client (for example, if the therapist has to masturbate in front of the client). Some kind of compensation must, however, be given or promised by the client in exchange of the sexual service from the massage therapist; otherwise Chap.6 Sec. 11 and Sec. 12 are not applicable."* Helena Ljunggren, Senior Public Prosecutor, Swedish Prosecution Authority, National Unit against Organized Crime.

4. THE INDUSTRY

4.1 EVOLUTION OF THAI MASSAGE PARLORS IN MALMÖ

The first Thai massage parlor in Malmö was established in the year 2000. The founder of this parlor was a traditional Thai massage teacher. When she opened the parlor, she recruited several women with basic massage skills. Those women received extensive training prior to starting the job. A few years later her staff started to leave the parlor, one by one to open their own parlors. The massage business in Malmö was slowly growing when a few more parlors were opened, according to the Thai massage teacher. The number of Thai massage parlors increased from 50 in 2013[8] to 95 in 2017[9] and increased to 106 at the time of this study. According to a key informant and five respondents, the first "happy ending" massage parlor opened in 2004. It was started by a Thai couple who owned a massage parlor in Denmark. They took the business model and replicated it in Malmö. According to the respondents, they were very successful. A few years after they opened several parlors, they sold the business and moved out of the country. Many people saw this as a lucrative business and replicated the model.

[8] https://www.thelocal.se/20130808/49526
[9] Johansson, E. & Ramussen, S. (2017). Uppsökande projekt Thaimassagesaloger i Malmö, Malmö Commune.

Not all Thai massage parlors are owned and operated by Thai people. Several are run by other Asian nationalities such as Filipino and Vietnamese. They use the Thai name "Thai massage" and Thai flag like other Thai massage parlors. Key informants and respondents estimated between 5% to 10% of parlors in Malmö are run by other nationalities.

Individual as well as FGDs interviews with owners and masseuses estimated that 60% to 80% of parlors engage in happy endings. If this estimation is accurate then this means the illicit massage industry appears to be booming compared to 2013 when the police reported that one in five Thai massage parlors in Malmö engaged in sexual services.[10]

Specific statements made by the key informants and respondents include:

All parlors provide "happy endings."

"Only a few parlors don't do happy endings."

"Today no more than 10 parlors are offering serious massage."

"There are only 6 parlors that I can confidently say are doing serious massage."

"Although many places are providing happy endings not all women in those parlors are doing happy endings."

- **Indicators that a massage parlor provides a Happy Ending**

The researcher asked key informants and respondents how to identify which parlors provide happy ending services. The common response is that the parlor will have closed curtains and the women will not wear a traditional Thai traditional uniform, instead they will wear a ting-tip and short skirt. "*The parlors that have closed curtains are likely offering happy endings*", said one of the respondents. "*Some of the parlors only accept male customers*" said another respondent. The researcher spent two afternoons observing the parlors with closed curtains and saw only male clients enter those parlors.

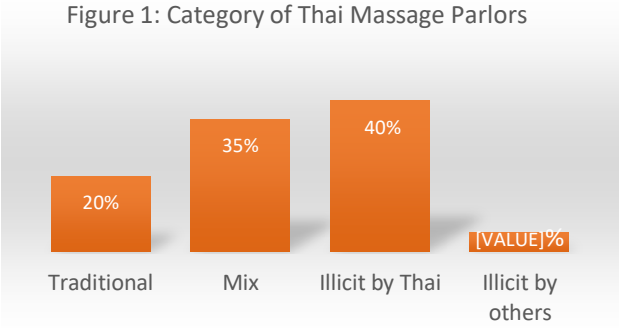
None of the key informants and respondents believed that the women who are providing a happy ending are forced. *"No one is forced to give a happy ending. Women can say no if they do not want to do it. They are all doing it voluntarily",* said one of the key informants and two of the respondents who previously provided happy endings.

[10] https://www.thelocal.se/20130808/49526

The Thai massage business in Malmö can be categorized into four groups:

1. **Traditional** massage (provides no happy ending)
2. **A mix** of traditional and happy ending massage (occasionally may agree to give a happy ending. Not all women in the same parlor are providing happy endings)
3. **Illicit** Thai massage parlors (mainly provide happy ending services)
4. **Illicit** Thai massage parlors operated by other nationalities (mostly provide happy ending services)

Figure 1: Category of Thai Massage Parlors



- **Reputation of the Thai Massage Parlors**

"*Bad*" and "*Rotten*" were the words often used by the respondents when talking about the reputation of the Thai massage parlors in Malmö. In 2010 a lot of massage parlors opened in Malmö when people brought their family and friends from Thailand to Malmö and many were young people without massage training. *"They don't know how to do a proper massage as they were not trained. They also don't want to work hard, they prefer to do happy ending massages which take just few minutes and they can earn extra money plus tip."* said one of the respondents. This was also echoed by other respondents.

Most informants feel hopeless about the reputation of the Thai massage industry and do not know how to change the reputation. They prefer to focus on their own business. They think it does not impact their business as they have their regular clients and their clients are different and do not want a happy ending.

A few respondents did act, including changing the name of the parlor and removing the Thai flag so they are not associated with happy ending massage parlors.

One of the respondents told her story. "*I decided to change the parlor name to avoid the word "Thaimassage" as customers associate it with sex. Also, the Thai Flag indicated sex to a lot of male customers. Some customers asked me 'why do you have a Thai flag and not giving happy endings?' Some customers came for happy endings and when I show them to the massage room, which obviously has nothing to do with sex, they left, and they never come back again*." (40-year-old, parlor owner)

"*I overheard one of my clients tell his friend over the phone "you can go to any massage parlors that have a Thai flag, you won't be disappointed." Some customers came and when they saw my face they just left with disappointment as they were expecting a young Thai woman! I decided to remove the Thai flag few years back*." (62-year-old, parlor owner)

4.2 BUSINESS MODEL

- **Business size and number of women employed**

According to key informants, respondents and researcher observations, a small size parlor (around 30 square meters with two beds) is usually composed of one owner and one masseuse. A medium size parlor is usually composed of three people (sometimes four) including an owner and two masseuses. A large size parlor is approximately eight people, including an owner. The owner also performs massages in most places. Most of the parlors are medium size (three people), therefore the median number is three people per parlor.

The current number of parlors in Malmö is around 106 and therefore we are looking approximately 318[11] women engaged in this industry. This figure will be much higher if we include the home-based parlors. At the moment there is no available data on this, so this is a rough estimate.

- **Rental**

When asking the parlor owners why they chose this business most of them would say, among other reasons, that it is a cost-effective business which requires a one-time investment for furniture and materials and the rest is just paying rent and other utilities. A common quote from the majority of respondents was, "*Nothing goes to waste compared to running a restaurant."* Informants from this study were paying between 12,000 up to 20,000 SEK/month in rent. The price depends on the location and the size of the building/room. Only a few parlors were owned by the parlor owners and the rest were renting.

"My rent is high, 12,000 including tax, electricity, and other utilities. I need to have a minimum of 5 customers a day in order to have some profit"
(54-year-old parlor owners who run a small size business.)

"*A one or two-person business with a rent of 12,000 SEK would be reasonable, and we can make some profit."*
(40-year-old parlor owners who run a small size business.)

Not all women are able to afford to rent a place on their own as they have no financial credit in the bank or other reference documents required by the landlord. Many of them were renting under their Swedish partner or husband's name. The situation was worse for those who have no partner/husband as they have to pay higher rent. There are at least four people in town whose business is to rent out massage parlors. These people rent a place, establish it as a Thai massage parlor and then rent it out to others. Those who sublet from these people have to pay double the price.

[11] 106 parlors x 3 persons (1 owner and 2 masseuses) = 318 persons.

"*The Swedish owner pays 10,000 SEK for rent and the women who rent after him have to pay 20,000 SEK/month. Many women have no credit in the bank and no one to guarantee their financial status and cannot open a parlor on their own. It is a business and some of them have 4 to 5 shops and rent them out, which is a very lucrative income*." (54-year-old parlor owner)

"*I owned 8 parlors previously and have just sold 4 of them and rent out some of the remaining. It is under my husband's name*." (53-year-old parlor owner)

It is worth highlighting that one of the main reasons for providing happy ending services is their operational cost. Providing a happy ending increases revenue, and as most masseuses must pay a high rent and living costs, they use this as a way to make more money. In order to make a profit or even to survive the owner may decide not to report all income to the tax authority and/or recruit illegal workers. Based on key informant interviews, in the last six months approximately 10 parlors were shut down and around 15 parlors have changed owners, because they did not earn enough money and did not pay enough tax.

- **Illicit Massage Parlors**

It was mentioned by several respondents and key informants that there are a few Thai women with Swedish husbands who own several parlors and provide happy ending services only. Those who operate several massage parlors often use someone else's name to register in order to hide their identity and avoid questions regarding income tax. Women who works in these parlors are a mix of relatives of the owner, women with legal status and female tourists. These establishments communicate with their regular clients via protected social media such as Facebook. Women were rotated from parlor to parlor to attract clients with new women.

- **Recruitment of women**

There are four categories of women involved in the Thai massage industry:

Women with legal status - It is getting difficult for the owners to recruit women with legal status for various reasons including the women not wanting to report their earnings to avoid paying income tax or the owner prefers to report only a portion of the income to the authorities. This means part of the income that the masseuses earned did not get reported and so they will not be eligible for the long-term benefits like pension and government benefits.

According to a key informant interviewed, *"Most women with legal status wish to have a full-time job and enjoy social benefit like others. Those who have options will find other types of work and those who remain in this business want to get out but do not know how. Most women who live in Malmö do not want to be seen associated with the Thai massage business as it has a bad reputation."*

For masseuses who pay income tax, after deduction they will earn about 100 SEK per hour and if they only work a couple of hours a day, they will only take home about 200 SEK (see next section on how the income is divided between owner and employee). This is lower than the national standard. According to Kronofogden[12] a single person needs to earn approximately 360 SEK a day in order to survive. [13] The biggest motivation as to why some women choose to avoid reporting their income tax is the financial responsibility they carry.

Women with a work permit – recruiting women from Thailand with a work permit is not encouraged as the government wants to prioritize women already in the country to reduce the unemployment rate and it is also an expensive option which most owners cannot afford. *"Working in a massage parlor is not the same as working in other sectors that follow the 8 hours working standard with fixed terms and benefits. The owner also has to provide accommodation and so on. The massage owner cannot afford this",* said one of the parlor owners. However, a few women do come through this arrangement including two of the respondents, because they are related to the owner. It is a way to support family members.

Based on the key informants interviewed, there is another type of recruitment where the owner brings in women from Thailand. Women have to pay 20,000 SEK for transportation, work permit and logistics. Once they arrive, they have to work to pay off these costs. The cost of food and accommodation will also be added and deducted from her income. These women try to find a Swedish husband before the contract is ended so that they can continue living and working in Sweden. There is a lot of pressure on the women in this circumstance.

[12] https://www.kronofogden.se/Start.html

[13] 360 SEK calculated from 4,923SEK cost to cover food, clothes, hygiene, phone, insurance, household items, and minor expenses plus an estimate 6,000SEK rent/per month divided by 30 days.

Women with a tourist visa – According to respondents from both individual and FGDs, only massage parlors that engage in happy endings employ this group of women.

> According to a key informant, "*When the police started to crack down heavily on prostitution a lot of women (with legal status) who used to engage in happy ending work started to look for work in other countries in Europe. Since then it is very difficult for the owner to recruit workers. Many owners started to attract women with a tourist visa. The owner must have created some sort of network to attract those women. Women are kept inside the parlor, but they are not forced to work or perform happy endings if they don't wish to, however, they are under pressure to make a lot of money before they return*."

Most respondents said that the owners use Facebook to attract the women. There is a specific Facebook page for Thai massage with constant job announcements. Once the women arrive in Malmö they are kept inside the parlor and mostly hide at the back of the parlor and don't leave. They buy food from the food vendors who deliver to their door step. Most women stay until their tourist visa expires, usually a three-month period. Women during this period are under high pressure to earn as much money as they can. A respondent who had previously provided happy endings and who has been in this business for a long time mentioned that these women are often tricked by the owner and they are in a vulnerable position. "*They were promised high income, but it is not true. I really feel sorry for them*."

All the money they earn is in cash and there is an agent who helps transfer money back to their bank in Thailand. This is a door-to-door service and the agent deducts the transfer fee. The fee can range from 10% to 20% of the amount transferred and the exchange rate from Swedish to Thai baht are often lower than the bank rate.

Most of the key informants and respondents were asked to give an estimate of the number of women with tourist visas employed in the Thai massage industry. The estimation ranged from 30% to 60% with the majority estimating 50% of the total work force are the tourist group. According to the key informants it is a new trend of women travelling for work. A new destination has been discovered, new and younger and more educated Thai women are touring Europe with a tourist visa, but the actual purpose is to work in a restaurant or Thai massage parlors. The common destinations are Hungary and Poland. Many travelled further to Sweden to work in a massage parlor.

According to the Thai Town Foundation based in Hungary, which is a member of the Thai women Network in Europe[14], Eastern European countries such as Hungary, Czech Republic,

[14] https://twne.eu/

Slovakia, Poland, Romania, etc. have become a new target for Thai women for marriage migration. These Eastern European nations have recently improved their economy and the people have discovered Thailand from their travels. For various reasons, some young men from these countries prefer to marry Thai women, (BBC Thailand, March 2019).[15]

A case story below confirmed this new migration trend.

> A 35-year-old respondent with a complete secondary education who had just arrived in Sweden. The respondent and two of her friends were recruited by a Thai-Malaysian company to work at a Thai massage parlor in Poland. The employer arranged a two-year work permit for them. During her time in Poland she traveled to Sweden to visit friends who introduced her to a Thai massage parlor in Malmö and she worked a few weeks during her visit. She did this several times over a year and build connections with different massage parlors. After the first year in Poland she was invited by a new boyfriend she found on Facebook in Malmö and she decided to quit her job and move to Malmö.

The researcher began to develop a picture of the movements of the women in the massage business. The women who lived in Sweden travelled on a short-term basis to different countries in Europe to work in happy ending massage parlors and some just travelled within Sweden, up north or Stockholm. This has created a gap in the labour force within the massage industry in Malmö and this has then been filled by the newcomers from other parts of Europe, and directly from Thailand.

It was previously researched that most Thai women migrate to Sweden through marriage migration and often Swedish men go to Thailand and meet Thai women to bring back to Sweden, but today things are starting to look quite different. Women now have better access to social media and are well connected to their friends and family in Europe. Women take charge of their life and are not waiting to be picked. As demonstrated above, more and more women are deciding to travel for work through a legal process (work permit) and while doing that they are searching for a partner.

Women with a fake marriage - It is a common pattern that parlor owners recruit women from Thailand through a fake marriage arrangement. The owner will help facilitate the whole process including recruiting a Swedish man to be the husband. Once they arrive in Sweden the women are often under the care of the owner. However, according to key informants the women pays approximately 100,000 SEK to the fake husband and other amounts for transportation and paper work costs, food and accommodation.

[15] https://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-47101992?ocid=socialflow_facebook

Below is a fake marriage case:

> 49-year-old respondent from Northeast of Thailand. The respondent was approached by one of the parlor owners to come to work in Sweden. The owner and the respondent used to work together in a massage parlor in Thailand. The respondent has a heavy financial burden and needs to earn extra income which is the main reason for her accepting the offer. The parlor owner told her that the only way to bring her to work in Sweden is through an arranged marriage. The owner offered to find a man to be a fake partner who can help guarantee her visa, but she would have to pay for the guarantor fee. She would not say how much she has to pay.
>
> The guarantor went to Thailand twice to meet with the informants for the purpose of documentation to prove that their relationship is real. They took photos when they went out for dinner as evidence for when she applied for a visa. She was granted a visitor permit but she does not really understand what it means and how it will affect her stay. The respondent arrived in Sweden three months ago. She is currently staying with the owner and the owner is providing food. She started to work right away and has served between two to four customers per day.

The price for hiring a fake husband varies and depends on the relationship and trust between the women and the man and the circumstances. The arrangement seems to be an informal one, but women can be taken advantage of by the guarantor.

> A 32-year-old respondent separated from her Swedish partner during the first year of her two-year residence permit period. She did not want to return to Thailand as it would be losing face to her family and friends in Thailand. She also has financial responsibilities toward her family in Thailand. The only option for her was to try and stay in Sweden and get a decent job. She consulted her friend on the situation, her friend helped her to find a Swedish man to be her fake partner as guarantor for a visa. She had to pay him 50,000 SEK but she did not have the money, so she agreed to pay him 3,000 per month. They did the application together and got it approved.
>
> Problems started to emerge with the man who was posing as her partner. He wanted her to be his real wife and started to control her life, he asked her to report to him her whereabouts. He threatened to stop the visa process if she did not follow his demands. She did not want to marry him and tried to compromise by going out with him and reporting to her plans for the week. A few months later her friends found the respondent a new boyfriend who she had two children with, and they lived together for several years but now they are separated.

However, there is a new and more structured business when it comes to fake marriage. Two of the respondents were approached at their parlors by Arab men and asked if they needed a guarantor for a visa. They offered this as a more organized service that is now available and easy to access.

- **Profits**

A case study below provides a rough estimate of the profit for a small operation providing traditional Thai massage. This is based on a real case situation from a 55-year-old parlor owner.

> Her rent is 10,000 SEK/month including value added tax. She charged 500 SEK/hour and serve about four clients per day (total four hours of work). She earned approximately 48,000/month. After deducting rent, tax and operational cost her monthly salary is about 13,000 SEK.
>
> During peak season she would hire one masseuse and pay her staff a fixed monthly salary. She pays 18,000 SEK for the salary plus 3,900 (30%) for the employer's fee. Her staff also served about four clients/day. The total earnings from her staff is 48,000 SEK. Hence, she makes profit from bringing additional person around 26,100 SEK/month.

As for the illicit massage parlors, it is assumed that half of their income is not reported. For example, if the case above brought in women on a tourist visa then she would not report her staff income hence she would profit even more, which makes illicit massage a lucrative business.

4.3 HOW BIG IS THE PROSTITUTION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING SITUATION IN THE THAI MASSAGE INDUSTRY IN MALMÖ?

According to Trafficking in Persons Report - US Department of State, *"in 2017, police investigated 212 trafficking cases (82 sex trafficking and 130 labor trafficking), compared with 196 cases (82 sex trafficking and 114 labor trafficking) in 2016. Of the cases in 2017, 23 sex trafficking cases involved children and 40 of the labor trafficking cases were forced begging."*[16]

Police reported that "*certain establishments, such as massage parlors, are used as a cover for organized crime with a focus on prostitution activities where the majority of victims originate from other countries such as Thailand. 41 crimes concerning purchase of sexual services in the southern region including Malmö were reported in 2017. Most sex purchases took place in*

[16] https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2018/282758.htm

apartments and Thai massage parlors and the women came from various countries including Thailand."[17]

Currently there is no data on the magnitude of the prostitution and human trafficking problem in the Thai massage parlors in Malmö. By its nature, human trafficking is a difficult crime to quantify with precision. The working conditions of the women are often invisible to the public and law enforcement, which qualifies their situation as trafficking. It is a crime that often takes place across borders**.** The international nature of the crime is difficult to comprehend, and it is complicated to prosecute traffickers.

However, given the working definition (see Chapter 3) and legal framework concerning prostitution and human trafficking the study intends to analyze the data collected against the legal framework in order to provide an overview of the situation. The data presented in this report is based on quantitative data from key informants and respondents and cannot be used as a definitive source of information without further investigation and verification.

According to respondents, 50% of illicit Thai massage parlors recruit two categories of women – women with a tourist visa and women with fake marriage status. These illicit massage parlors employ approximately 106 women.[18] The data indicated that the situation facing these women could be considered as human trafficking for sexual and labour purposes.

The definition of human trafficking given in the Swedish Penal Code (1962:700) Chapter 4 1a § 1st. uses three criteria to determine if a case is trafficking;

ACT **(What is done?)**		**MEANS** **(How it is done?)**		**PURPOSE** **(Why it is done?)**
Recruiting Or Transporting Or Transferring Or Harbouring Or Receiving of person	&	*Threat or use of Force* *Or* *Coercion* *Or* *Abduction* *Or* *Fraud* *Or* *Deception* *or* *Abuse of power / vulnerability* Or Sale/Purchase	&	Sexual exploitation Or Removal of organs Or Active military service Or Forced labour

[17] Människohandel för sexuella och andra ändamål, Lägesrapport 19, Police authoriy 2017, p.9 & 99
[18] Total parlors in Malmö is 106 and 50% is 53 parlors x 2 persons/parlor = 106 women.

In reference to a case concerning a 49-year-old respondent from Northeast of Thailand mentioned under "**Women with a fake marriage"** section**.**

If we look at this case scenario of a fake marriage, we can see that based on the criteria the owner has committed several crimes based on the trafficking protocol including recruiting and receiving of persons (*Action*), facilitating a fraud/fake marriage (*Means*), for the purpose of labour exploitation (*Purpose*). The man who has agreed to be the husband has also committed fraud.

This 49-year-old woman most likely has limited freedom of movement and is under the absolute control of the parlor owner as she has no family or friends in Sweden and does not know the language. It is obvious that she was brought to Sweden for the purpose of labour exploitation. The owner invested nearly nothing to bring this woman to work at her parlor, except providing accommodation and food, but it is not certain that these are free of charge either. There is no salary provided to this woman apart from the 100 SEK per hour of work, but she informed that she serves about four clients per day. The price for massage per hour is 400 SEK and the owner keeps 300 SEK and since it is illegal work the income is not taxed.

This woman has paid a lot of money, including air fare and a fee for the man who is willing to be her fake husband. According to key informants the fee could be up to 100,000 SEK. She will have to work for a very long time to pay back this amount given she only earns 400 SEK per day.

In the case of recruitment of women with a tourist visa there is no case study to reference. However, based on the data collected, some women are tricked through social media to come to work in the illicit massage parlors and once they arrive, most women are kept inside the parlor 24 hours a day. According to Polaris,[19] this group of women are very vulnerable and could potentially be facing several issues including:

- The women are often told they can earn a certain amount each month and the parlor owner will help get her to Sweden and arrange accommodation, however, while this sounds easy for the women, she will often be living at the massage parlor in a foreign city with no return air fare.
- Their freedom of movement and lifestyle will be limited, and they will most likely be kept inside the parlor at all times.
- The use intimidation and force, including abandoning any women who refuses to perform sex acts as a way of intimidating others into obeying.
- The women feel pressured to make sure the client has enjoyed their time at the massage parlor to earn more money.

[19] https://polarisproject.org/massage-parlor-trafficking

Should such situations as mentioned above occur, it then qualifies as a case of human trafficking for sexual exploitation purpose.

4.4 HOW BIG IS THE DEMAND AND WHO ARE THE CUSTOMERS AND HOW IS THIS EXPLOITATION POSSIBLE?

Demand is created by both men and women (mostly men) who seek to purchase sex services from persons who may be vulnerable. It is no different to the legitimate market, supply and demand for sex services are correlated. Demand causes sex trafficking to occur in countries around the world including Sweden. Without demand for services there would be no market for sex services and/or sex trafficking victims.

According to Helena Ljunggren, Senior Public Prosecutor, Swedish Prosecution Authority, National Unit against Organized Crime.

> *"It is really difficult to tell "how big" the prostitution and human trafficking situation is in Malmö because it is hard to get accurate statistics on this matter. It is, however, my personal belief that human trafficking for sexual purposes in Malmö is more common than those cases that we receive and handle at my office every year. As regards to demand for sexual services in general, I can tell from other trafficking cases over the years that it constantly seems to be high. The customers come from all kind of groups in society as regards education, economy, work, family situation and ethnic background."*

It seems as if everyone agrees that the demand for sex services in the Thai massage parlors remains high. The researcher asked if the number of requests has been reduced since the authority is randomly monitoring the parlors and a few parlors have been shut down. All respondents said that the number of phone calls remain the same. Parlors receive constant telephone calls (showing no number) from clients asking if they are providing happy ending services or not. Walk-in clients asking for a happy ending is also common. Everyone thinks that there is a high demand, but no one seem to know how big the demand is.

Data collected from a survey shows that the public underestimates the number of Thai massage parlors with only one respondent (male) saying that he knows there are more than 100 parlors in Malmö. The rest were very surprised when the researcher provided the number of parlors. While it seems as if happy ending services are not a secret for men (five out of thirteen were aware of their availability), the female respondents suspected they were happening, but were not sure. Four out of 20 respondents (one woman and three men) from the survey said they were regular customers at Thai massage parlors in Malmö.

With limited data collected during a very short timeframe it is not possible to come up with the analysis in terms of the scale of the demand for sexual services. However, the number of the calculation of women engaging in the prostitution highlighted below may shade light to the size of the problem. Since happy ending service is considered as prostitution by the Swedish law (see definition under Chapter 3), and the majority of key informants and respondents estimated that 80% of total parlors are engaging in happy ending, then this mean at least 85 parlors (total is 106 parlors) are engaging in prostitution at some point in time. Most of the parlors in Malmö are medium size with 3 persons per parlor (see section 4.2). This would mean 255 women (85 parlors x 3 persons) are engaged in prostitution either on regular or ad hoc basis. A rough estimate shows that the happy ending massage industry generates approximate 10 million SEK each month[20]. If we include the total income of all the parlors the number would be quite different. However, as mentioned the "Mixed" parlors include both women who do and do not provide sexual services. The number of women engaged should be lower than 255.

The demand for sex services within the Thai massage industry in Malmö comes predominantly from men from all walks of life and all age groups and status – young and old, married and single. Men with family and children who purchase happy endings were also mentioned by respondents several times. On two occasions respondents mentioned that female clients also requested happy endings, but this was very rare situation, said the respondents.

The exploitation is possible because of various factors. First, the women who chose to engage in sex services have no or limited access to an alternative income to support themselves. The working conditions of women are often invisible, and it is easy for them to fall prey to the exploiter(s). Second, parlor owners may use coercion and fraud to lure their victims into sexual exploitation in the illicit massage business. The punishment for purchasing sex services in Sweden is rather low, if found guilty they only have to pay a 2,000 kronor fine and the crime could be repeated several times before a more serious punishment is put in place. See further discussion in the next chapter on vulnerability.

However, the main reason that this exploitation is possible is that there is a demand for it. There are buyers, almost all men, who take advantage of economically and socially vulnerable women. Because there is a demand, there will always be exploitation and trafficking.

[20] 85 parlors x 3 women x 4 clients/day x 400 SEK per transaction x 24 days/month + at the minimum 300 SEK for happy ending service.

5. THE INDIVIDUAL

5.1 POPULATION

Since the year 2000, the annual number of migrants from Thailand to Sweden has increased substantially, with a 400% increase in less than two decades (table below). Women account for approximately 78% of the total immigrating Thai population, mainly due to Thai women marrying Swedes.[21]

Table 2: Migration flows to Sweden 2000 - 2017

Thailand	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Men	2,646	2,820	3,078	3,462	3,832	4,249	4,687	5,176	5,702	6,314	6,908	7,352	7,729	8,026	8,283	8,443	8,671	8,956
Women	7,707	8,365	9,297	10,832	12,449	14,028	15,837	17,750	20,156	22,425	24,470	26,261	27,825	28,948	29,846	30,349	31,206	32,284

The statistics in Malmö in terms of ratio between male and female are in line with the national statistics mentioned above. According to Stadskontoret/City Executive Office, Malmö municipality, there were 1,176 Thais registered in Malmö in 2018, and of this 920 (78%) were women and 256 (22%) were men. [22] Several key informants estimated higher than the official figures - 2,000 Thais living in Malmö. This estimate could be realistic considering that Malmö is the third-largest city in Sweden and has more opportunities for employment, which will draw Thai women who are living in the nearby cities. If this assumption holds true, then the total population of Thai women living and/or working in Malmö city could potentially reach approximately 1,500. Two respondents in this study demonstrated this assumption (see below). According to several parlor owners, Thai women who are living in nearby cities do come to look for massage jobs as an alternative short-term solution. They do this when they need money to spend or send back to family in Thailand.

> Ms A & Ms B are both living in the southern part of Skåne. Ms A works as a masseuse in Thai massage parlors based in Malmö and in Copenhagen. She works every other week in Malmö and the other week in Copenhagen. She stays in these cities during her work period. Ms B is studying SFI at the commune where she lives and works as a part time masseuse in different places. She goes where there are jobs available. Malmö is one of the destinations that she goes to work. Both women have a lot of Thai friends in Malmö. (Female masseuses, aged 32 & 30)

[21] Webster, N. & Haandrikman, K. (2014). Thai women in Sweden: Victims or Participants? P20, 23, 24.
[22] Original source of data was from Statistics Sweden

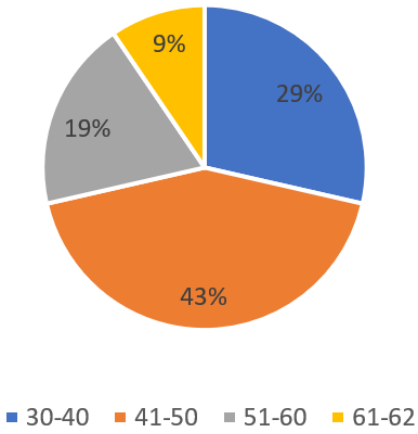
5.2 WOMEN'S PROFILE

The sample group used in this study were selected to represent the entire population of Thai women in massage parlors in Malmö as they represented a cross section of the industry and the women employed in it.

This section outlines the profile of the women in the study (27 women including 11 owners, 14 masseuses and 2 receptionist). The information on age, education, province, and reasons for migration came from the in-depth interviews with 12 owners and 9 masseuses. The profile for both owners and masseuses are relatively similar and for this reason the data presented in this section uses a combined profile of owners and masseuses.

All respondents are first-generation migrants[23] and the majority of women interviewed for this study were all aged between 30 to 62. The overall average age was 45 years while the average age of the owners was 49. These women come from three generations within the Thai massage industry. The first generation was the women who were part of the start-up period for Thai massage parlors in Malmö, between 2000 and 2004. Their age ranged between 50 and 62.

Figure 2: Overall age breakdown



The second generation is the women who became involved in the massage business from 2004 onward. 2004 was when the Thai massage industry in Malmö began to grow. The age range for this group is 30 to 55 years old. The third generation is the newly recruited masseuses including two persons (35 and 49 years old). Two of them arrived in Sweden at the beginning of this year. According to FGDs, respondents observed that women who come as a tourist are generally young women.

The majority reported that they had married (67%) a Thai man and separated or their husband passed away (2 persons) before they met their Swedish partners. Of this number, nine women reported having two children from a previous marriage and that they left their children behind in Thailand because they were older children and it would be difficult to integrate into school, or they could not afford to bring them to Sweden. Only two women interviewed brought their children from previous marriages with them as the children were still very young when they migrated. Only five women reported having children with their Swedish partners. 23% of

[23] First-generation in this context refer to Thai women born in Thailand and has immigrated and become a citizen, or permanent resident in Sweden.

respondents were single when they met their new Swedish partners. The remaining 10% did not provide this information.

The majority of respondents reported that they migrated through the marriage migration process (including a case with a fake marriage) but five of the women had recently separated from their Swedish partners. Four of them had partners from other countries who lived and worked in Malmö, including Danish, Italian and Croatian. A common trend appeared to be Thai women marrying men from other countries, especially Danish men, and moving to Malmö. Two of the respondents confirmed this. The researcher also had the opportunity to meet with two couples (Thai women and Danish men) who recently moved from Copenhagen to Malmö. Both women had a high education from Thailand but without any job opportunities one of them ended up working in a massage parlor as a receptionist.

The data shows that the women came from different educational backgrounds. A large number of women had only completed primary (42%) or secondary education (33%).

Looking at the breakdown data from both groups (owners and masseuses), there does not appear to be a significant difference between their education levels. For example, four owners and five masseuses have primary education and five owners and two masseuses a secondary education. Younger women appear to be more likely to have attained a higher education such as vocational education or university at a bachelor level.

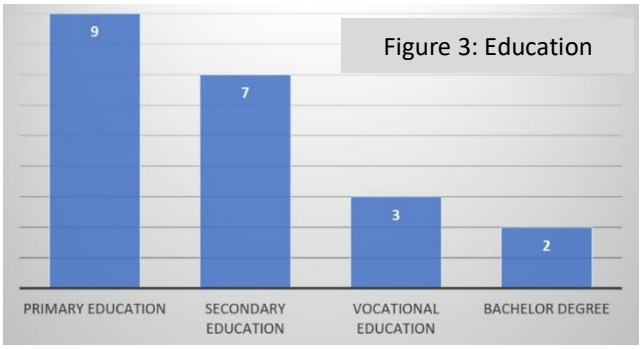
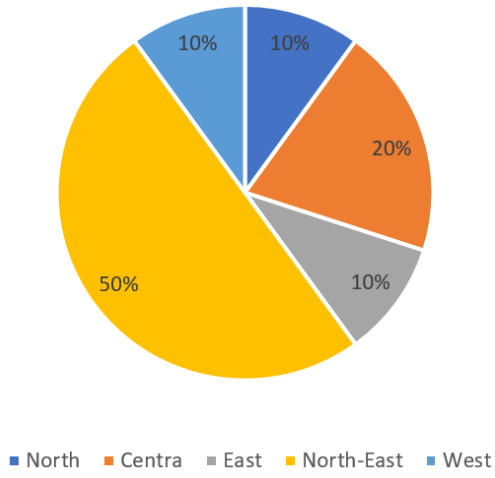


Figure 3: Education

Respondents were asked about their province of origin in Thailand and their professional background. The respondents come from many regions but 50% of the group came from the North-East and the highest reported provinces were Khon Kan and Korat provinces. The Northeast of Thailand is known as one of the poorest and most affected by natural disasters. There is a long history of people from this region migrating to large cities like Bangkok to look for better employment with the hope to better their future for themselves and their families. In Thailand, women from the North-East region are the largest demographic in the massage business in Thailand. However, women from other regions can also

Figure 4: Province of Origin



be found and the numbers from the North are increasing. The study found a similar situation in Malmö, where 50% of the sample group come from other regions and even from the central regions like Bangkok.

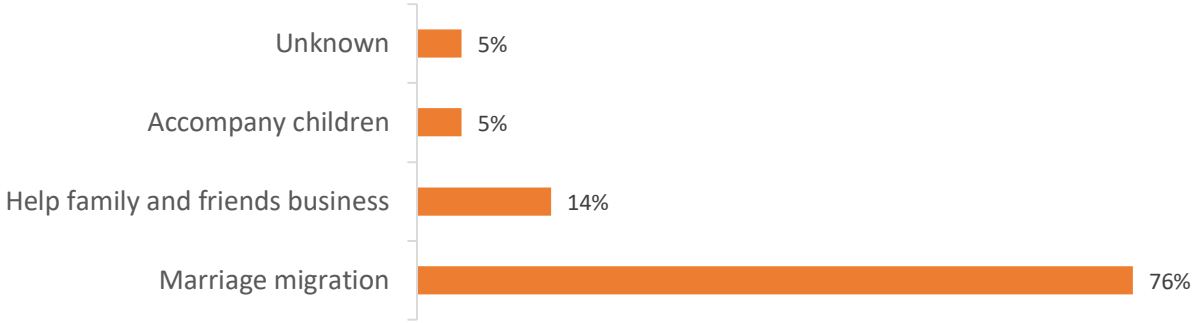
The data reveals that the respondents come from a diverse range of professions. Seven (35%) out of 21 respondents were former masseuses, with the rest coming from various professions. This includes five women who used to run their own small business such as selling construction materials, hair salon, restaurant and café and four others who were working for travel agents, real estate agents, an accounting firm, and one woman who was working on her own farm. Four other respondents did not provide this information.

Due to trust issues, this study was not able to engage directly with many women traveling on a tourist visa. Only two women in the study fell into this category and they were only willing to provide general information, which we did not consider adequate to provide analysis in this section.

- **Drivers of Migration**

The women were asked to name their main reasons for migrating to Malmö, Sweden and how they prepared for the journey and the main sources of finance for the migration journey. The majority of the respondents (75%) migrated for marriage migration purposes while 14% came to Malmö to help their relatives and friends run a massage business, one person who came as a child with her mother and the remaining 10% did not provide this information.

Figure 5: Reasons of Migration



The main drivers for marrying for migration are to improve their living conditions and to meet financial needs.

Most of the women came from the mid to low income level and they cannot see any other alternatives but to marry for migration. "*The only way for Thai women to come here is to marry a Swedish man."* said one of the respondents. Even though most women may see Swedish men (or other European nationals mentioned earlier) as an open passport to bring them to Sweden, the relationship often develops into more. A few women stated that they had fallen in love

either from the start or the love grew as time went on, while the rest of the respondents said they have respect for their partners and are thankful that they were given an opportunity to come to Sweden. None of the respondents from this group were fully financially dependent on their partners/husbands.

Some women knew when they got married that they would have to find work and support their own family in Thailand.

> A 55-year-old masseuse working in the South of Thailand. She met an Italian man (who lives in Malmö) at her work place, and they fell in love. Before they decided to get married, they made a financial agreement. He made it clear that he will not be able to provide financial support for her family as he cannot afford it. She agreed, if he could provide her with food and accommodation and she would find a job and send all the money she makes home to Thailand. They remain a couple to this day.

14% of respondents came to Sweden on a two-year work permit that is meant to be a one-time arrangement as it is too costly to process. They would have to return to Thailand after the permit expired, but all of them found partners and got married during the work permit period. This changed their status and allowed them to live and work in Sweden. This is the opposite process compared to the first group mentioned earlier but the outcome is the same i.e. getting married to a Swedish man and working and living in Sweden.

The respondent that came to Sweden through the fake marriage process made it very clear that she was in Sweden to work and had no intention of marrying again. She mentioned having had a bad experience from a previous marriage.

It is important to understand the preparations the women make before they migrate as it can help us to see issues that can arise from a lack of knowledge. All the respondents received their information on Sweden from various channels including family or friends living in Thailand, family or friends in Sweden, and social media such as Facebook. However, most information is limited and mostly focuses on the travel and work but not much about Sweden as a country and how things operate.

The most recent arrival to Sweden said that she did not know about the country and did not look up any information. She relied solely on her employer to give her information. This was alarming as there were a few occasions that respondents asked the researcher about government rules and regulations regarding visas during the interviews. It seems they have a very limited understanding of their status.

Those who migrated for marriage were financed by their partners except the two newest arrivals (one with a fake marriage) who had to cover their own costs. Both respondents

preferred not to reveal the amount they paid for their journey. For those who migrated with a work permit, the parlor owner financed their travel.

- **Women's Vulnerabilities**

There are four groups of women employed in this business sector including 1) women with legal status, 2) those with a tourist visa, 3) those in a fake marriage and 4) those with work permit.

The women in all groups are in a vulnerable position and one of the main factors causing this problem is their legal status in Sweden. This vulnerability puts them at risk of becoming involved in the illicit massage industry, either for money, visas or accommodation.

Women from the first three groups are considered the most vulnerable. As described under section 4 the women who came to Sweden on a tourist visa or in a fake marriage are facing numerous challenges and risks and are considered victims of human trafficking for both labour and sexual exploitation. Women who hold a two-year residence permit because they are married are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. According to Swedish law, if the marriage ends before the two years are up, the women must return to their home country. The law allows for women to apply for a new residence permit, but they will have to find a new partner to guarantee their visa. See further details in Chapter 5 section 16 paragraph 3 The Aliens Act (2005:716)[24].

This law puts many women in a difficult situation which can sometimes lead to abuse. It has been well criticized by experts.

"This legal construction brings with it a special tactic for control often used by the abuser, namely the threat of a forced return to the country of origin. Abused immigrant women with insecure residency live constantly under the threat that the men might leave them, and some men even inform the Swedish Migration Board that the relationship is unstable." (Misiowiec 1999; Lenardt 2008; ROKS 2009).

"Immigration law does, however, recognize the problem that immigrant women exposed to male partner violence do not dare disclose their exposure within the two-year probationary period due to fear of deportation and therefore continue a relationship in which they are abused. For this reason, even if the relationship has ended before the two-year time limit has expired, a residence permit may be granted, if the main reason for ending the relationship is

[24] https://www.government.se/contentassets/784b3d7be3a54a0185f284bbb2683055/aliens-act-2005_716.pdf

that the woman or her children have been exposed to violence or other serious violations of freedom or personal integrity (the domestic violence rule)."[25]

According to one of the respondents, *"a lot of women separate from their sambo (partner) because they don't really know each other before agreeing to move to Sweden. The partnership does not really work because of the cultural differences and language barrier. When a relationship falls apart during the first two years women beg their partner to keep them in Sweden until they have their visa approved and during that time women will quickly try to find a new man to be their guarantor."* The respondent who told her story on page 18 was a victim of this process which led to abuse, her complete story is below.

Shattered dream!

A 32-year-old respondent separated from her Swedish partner during the first year of her two-year residence permit period. She did not want to return to Thailand as it would be losing face to her family and friends in Thailand. She also has financial responsibilities toward her family in Thailand. The only option for her was to try and stay in Sweden and get a decent job. She consulted her friend on the situation, her friend helped her to find a Swedish man to be her fake partner as guarantor for a visa. She had to pay him 50,000 SEK but she did not have the money, so she agreed to pay him 3,000 per month. They did the application together and got it approved. During this time the respondent has very little money and no place to live. Her auntie who owns a massage parlor invited her over to work with her and a friend also suggested working at a massage parlor despite not being a trained masseuse.

Without Swedish language skills and higher education, she is in desperate need of housing and money, so she sees no other solution but go along with the plan. She went to Copenhagen to do happy ending massages at her aunt's parlor. Later she started to commute between Copenhagen and Malmö where she also works as a happy ending masseuse. Because she has no place to live, she must stay over-night at the massage parlors. The money she earns from this work go to her guarantor and her family in Thailand.

Problems started to emerge with the man who was posing as her partner. He wanted her to be his real wife and started to control her life, he asked her to report to him her whereabouts. He threatened to stop the visa process if she did not follow his demands. She did not want to marry him and tried to compromise by going out with him and reporting to her plans for the week. A few months later her friends found Ms.C a new boyfriend who she had two children with, and they lived together for several years but now they are separated.

"*My dream is to become a full time cleaner, but my problem is the language which is very limited. I have difficulty learning and I don't have much time*."

[25] Burman, M. (2012) "Immigrant Women Facing Male Partner Violence - Gender, Race and Power in Swedish Alien and Criminal Law" feminists@law, 2(1): 1-26

The majority of respondents agreed that there are a lot of women (they do not know the exact number) separated from their partners, either during the two-year residence permit or after that period. According to FGD, *"those who were dumped by their partners ended up in the massage parlor." "Four of my friends are recently separated and they are still under the two-year period."*

One of the contributing factors to women's vulnerability is that Thai culture demands gratitude and family obligation between parents and children. *"It is social and cultural ideals and ties that bind the parents in with their children. It is an asymmetrical reciprocity and deep-rooted morality, based on the Buddhist concept of obligations and "debts of merit". Parents bestow their bun khun upon children by giving them life and for loving and caring for them as they grow. In return, children owe their parents not only life-long gratitude and respect but also – and increasingly as they mature – their active assistance, including labor and income, in the material and spiritual support of the parental household."*[26] This, combined with a misperception by some of the parents that once their daughter marries a European man, she then will bring wealth to the family put the women in a vulnerable situation as they do not want to let their families down. [27]

There is a project being carried out by Kon Khen University in Kon Khen province (North-East) to raise awareness of relevant group of parents on the values of Western people regarding having a family and the lifestyle and work that their daughter might have to do, and the risk associated to it.[28]

Based on FGDs and key informants interviewed, most women do not tell the truth to their parents and relatives about their work and their engagement in sex services. The majority of women prefer to show their family that they are doing well in Sweden.

Eight out of the 21 women send almost all of their income, after deducting their own living costs, to family in Thailand, while those who have a husband send almost everything they earn to Thailand. The average amount they send is 10,000 SEK. Three informants said they used to send money regularly but now they cannot afford it as they have low income and struggle with their own living costs. The rest did not provide this information.

[26] Sine, P. (2007), Managing Migration - Risks and Remittances among Migrant Thai Women, student paper, Lund University
[27] https://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-41252033
[28] The project is a collaboration of Khon Kaen University and the Department of Women's Affairs and Family Institute. Ministry of Social Development and Human Security with 4 groups of goals: women who marry foreigners or women who are dating and will decide to marry Family groups, parents, volunteers, volunteers, and students from the College of Dramatic Arts Which is a group that has the opportunity to work abroad.

"*My financial burden in Thailand is never ended. I even have to pay for my grandchildren's weddings. I built a house in Thailand. My daughter is working in a hospital and has young children and her income is not enough, so I help her too. I am happy working here and sending money home*." (55-year-old respondent).

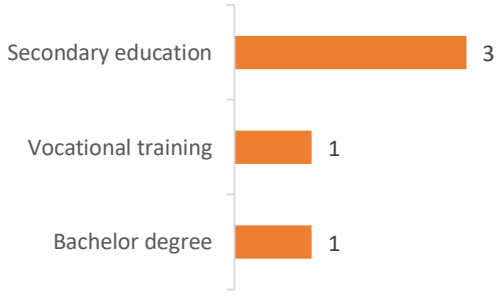
The ability to communicate in Swedish is a big barrier and an important factor contributing to vulnerability. One would expect women to have gained Swedish language skills over time living in Sweden given the government is providing free language education (Swedish for Immigrants (SFI)). Two of the 21 women did not attend the SFI course due to their legal status, and one owner said she did not have time. The rest of the women attended the SFI classes, but they struggled to juggle time between work and study and found it difficult to learn Swedish.

The Swedish speaking skills of the women in this study is in general relatively low. There are various explanations for this. Many of the women who have lived in Sweden for over ten years still struggle to speak Swedish. Many did not manage to complete the language program. Grammar and pronunciation are the most difficult parts of the language for them to comprehend. According to a SFI teacher, "*Women who only have primary education or lower often face difficulties when trying to learn Swedish, and this is especially true for those over thirty*".[29] *"The language is very important, but I am already too old for study and my brain does not function so well. The difficulty is the accent, no one understand when I speak Swedish. I also don't have a high education from Thailand which makes it difficult to learn.",* said a 55-year-old respondent.

A few respondents also voiced their concerns about some women's attitude toward learning and integrating into Swedish society. Many prefer to work and not study language or higher education. They are purposely coming to Sweden to work.

There were only five women out of the 21 who have completed the SFI course and speak Swedish well. They are the ones in the highest education group and who have lived in Sweden over ten years and all of them have a Swedish husband. The combination of level of education, period of stay and support women get from their partners would support their level of ability.

Figure 6: No. of completed SFI program



[29] An interview conducted by with a teacher at *Österlens folkhögskola, January 2019.*

The language issue is coupled with how the women integrate into Swedish society. Those who have a Swedish husband tend to integrate better. They socialize with other Swedes through their husband's friends and their in-laws. They have an opportunity to be exposed to the culture and practice their language skills. While, those who have no Swedish partner tend to spend time with their Thai friends and community as it might feel safer. There are two places in Malmö that Thai people get together in a large group, the temple Sangkhabaramee and the Swedish-Thai Cultural Association.

Some of those whose partners are non-Swedish are facing challenges. The language they use to communicate is mostly English and their partners do not have the knowledge to support them when it comes to government processes, rules and regulations so the women have to rely on Thai friends or the parlor owner to give them information.

The researcher had an opportunity to accompany one of the parlor owners, who has lived in Sweden for over ten years, to different places including restaurants. She would choose to go to restaurants that served a buffet, this way she does not have to order, and she can see the food that is served, however this can sometimes be costly. They went to dinner at a Swedish restaurant and the researcher realized the parlor owner could not read Swedish very well and she does not know what the food was in Swedish. She took a photo of the menu to try and remember which number the food they ate was so next time she would know what to order.

The importance on the role of friends has been emphasized by most of the informants. Most women met their first Thai friend at the SFI class. It is very common that Thai women stick together and influence each other. *"The new comers will listen to and are influenced by their "run pi" (big sister) if they don't follow, they will be considered a black sheep.",* 45-year-old respondent.

A 30-year-old respondent tells her story.

> *"When I first started my SFI class, I met another Thai student who introduced me to a cleaning job. I got a job because of her. Later on, I made another friend near where I live who introduced me to her Thai women network. We would meet at different birthday parties and often we met when we received our salary. I learnt from them how the Swedish system worked. Those who have been here long enough and who have faced many issues seem to know the system well. Among friends we recommend jobs to each other.*
>
> *I think the FUTURE of new comers really depends on the type of friends we have. My group of friends only recommended us to work and not study and mostly work in lower skills like cleaning. I was lucky when I also met a Thai nurse who has lived in Sweden for 15 years and she suggested I go to school and pursue a better future."*

Most of her friends used to do sex work in Copenhagen and would suggest her to go to Copenhagen to earn quick money. "*In Copenhagen, 3 meals and accommodation provided."*

Drug use, gambling and debt among women in the massage sector has been also mentioned as a major problem. According to FGD *"A lot of women are now addicted to gambling and the casino is full of Thai women. Because the women are hanging out as a social network and so they are pulling each other into gambling, drinking, etc. The majority of women in this category are aged around 40 and above."* According to a moneylender, *"a lot of women have big debt because of the gambling, and many end up having to do happy endings to pay back their debt."*

5.3 LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Majority of the women in this study have a proper place to live. The ones who have partner/husband mostly share the house/apartment. Some women have to share the cost of living as their partner/husband has a small income. Some of the women who separated from their partner/husband rent a small apartment, some share with their friends and a few live in the massage parlor. One informant with a fake marriage stays with the parlor owner.

Informants have voiced their concern over the housing issue. When there is a conflict in family women could request for housing support. Because the women do not understand that they could request support from the social authority they stay with their friends which often leads to another issue i.e. causing the host family conflict. Accommodation seems to be a key issue facing Thai women in the community regardless of what they do for the living.

Working hours - According to information retrieved from ThaiMassageGuiden[30] 50 parlors operate 7 days a week. Opening hours vary but the majority are operating 10 hours per day from 10:00-20:00 and some parlors are operating up to 12 hours (9:00 – 21:00) and opening every day. Prices range from 250 to 800 per hour, but the most common price is 400 SEK/hour. This price excludes extra charges for happy endings. Happy endings range from 300 up to 1,000 SEK, depending on negotiation between the masseuse and the client.

These are very long working hours and sometimes without a day off. One of the owners who operated seven days a week justified this by saying because they do not have clients all day and there are at least two people working which means one person can leave the parlor and run their errands or take a rest. However according to Swedish labour laws, a working week cannot exceed 40hours per week, employees require eleven hours of continuous leave in each 24-hour period, 36 hours of continuous leave every seven days and breaks must be arranged so that employees are not working more than five hours in a row.

[30] https://www.thaimassageguiden.se/

Hourly employment - The most common employment method of Thai massage business in Thailand is an hourly employment where masseuses only get paid for the hour that they are working and not for the waiting time. The income is split in different ratio for example 30/70 or 40/60 with the masseuse getting 30% or 40%. Some parlors may promise a guaranteed salary for the days that the masseuse receives no clients. The guaranteed amount is up to the negotiation between employer and employee. This model has been applied and adapted in the Thai massage industry in Malmö.

By nature, the massage business generates income on hourly basis, and it is an unpredictable and unstable income as their business depends on the number of clients they have. Some days they may have many clients, some days less and some days there may not be any clients at all. Most respondents said they serve between 2 to 4 clients per day. Respondents mentioned that at their best they can perform 5 hours of massage in a day, but they can extend it to 7 hours if needed but it is very tough on their body.

Because of the uncertainty, it is not favorable for the parlor owners to recruit full time employee. To hire a full-time masseuse would be a huge investment and there is a risk of not being able to earn enough income to pay for their employee. By law, the employer must pay wages, holiday pay and social security contributions for each employee.

> "*To have full time staff the employer is responsible for all costs which is why owners don't want to do this. Today, there is no full-time employee in this business.*
>
> *It is not fair for employees but at the same time it is not possible for employer either because this business depends on uncertainty. We do not have clients every day and not all hours and so the business generates uncertain income, and this cannot be guaranteed to the staff. We would have to pay from our own pockets if we were to hire a full-time employee. The work model is based on hour and so it has to be hourly pay*."
> (62-year-old, parlor owner)

Many parlors also have in on-call employees. There is a pool of women who mostly work in other sectors or study at SFI and want to earn extra income. When the owner needs an additional masseuse, she will call to see who might be available.

Not all massage parlors provide a written contract, the verbal agreement is more important. This is based on a trusted relationship especially when the women are related to the owner, a friend of the owner or a friend of a friend, etc. There is no data on how the illicit massage parlors deal with this matter.

Income sharing - None of the informants are members of the labour union and for this reason there is no regulated fixed minimum wage for the workers. A normal practice is the verbal agreement made between owner and the masseuses. The majority of informants said that the income is split 25/85 where the masseuse gets 25% and remainder goes to the owner. If the price is 400 SEK/hour the masseuse will take home 100 SEK.

According to informants who had previously provided happy endings there are several formulas on how the income is divided. For example, the client has to pay full price for an hour massage and if client want to have a happy ending then he/she could arrange directly with the masseuse where they will negotiate the price. In this case, the masseuse will only get the happy ending amount and the owner keeps the other 400 to herself. Another example is all costs are combined and they split 50/50.

Level of Income - The average earning of the masseuses in this study after tax deduction is, on average, 10,000 SEK per month while the owner earns from 10,000 up to 50,000 SEK per month. The income depends on the size of the parlor, number of masseuses, and number of clients they receive.

5.4 LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS

According to the informants', women who have been in Sweden a long time and separated from their Swedish partners are the ones who have firsthand experience about the system and how the social support works. However, they only know the rules and regulations that related to their problems and the rest is still limited. Those who has just arrived, especially the ones without legal status to work in Sweden, have limited or no knowledge on their rights.

One of the questions posed, is if they are aware of the Swedish laws on prostitution. Surprisingly, most respondents were not aware of the law and they believed that the women were also subject to fines, jail or even deportation should they be found doing happy ending services. This included a few of the parlor owners as well.

5.5 BARRIERS IN ACCESSING GOVERNMENT SERVICES

There are various barriers preventing or discouraging women from accessing services including:

- Language
- Being unaware that the government has a translation service
- Unfamiliarity with the social support system
- Belief that government services would be costly
- Not wanting to lose money by leaving work
- The government process is too lengthy and there is so much paper works which they find difficult to manage.

Women with a Swedish partner/husband tend to depend on their partner/husband to do the paperwork and anything related to the government. At work they also depend on their employer to give them information. However, some of the women have partners who have a lower level of education and do not understand how the system works either. This situation is even worse when the partner is not from Sweden.

Those who have no husband or friends to support them must survive on their own and they learn a lot about the system, but not without struggles.

> "*I was very shy speaking Swedish. When I separated from my sambo (partner) I had to go and get help. I have two children and no place to stay. It was a struggle from the beginning, but it got better over time. Commune staff are really supportive*".
> (32-year-old respondent).

> "*The new arrivals do not know where to buy or get birth control, not like in Thailand where we can buy it from the pharmacy but here you need a prescription. In the hospital they provide this for free, but people don't know that*."
> (30-year-old respondent).

Even though Sweden has a major program to support refugees and asylum seekers there is no special program for marginalized or vulnerable groups such as Thai women. Some women are feeling left out from government services. Here is the voice from the women. *"We are the last group to be supported by the government. Because we are not refugees and the government think we have a Swedish man to support us and so the government is not paying attention. If we compare with refugee, they will get quick support but if Thai women have problem, we have to fight to get the support we need.*" (40-year-old informant, owner)

"At the SFI class I was the only Thai student and the teacher was only paying attention to the majority which are the asylum seekers group. I was left alone most of the time. I decided to stop going to school." (55-year-old informant, masseuse)

- **Health issues & domestic violence**

It does not appear that sexual health is an issue among women in massage business. Most women said they received an invitation letter from the mammogram and gynecologist unit for an annual check which they said they accepted. It has also been reported that women do not like going to the hospital for various reason i.e. language issues, not knowing how the process works, prioritizing work and not health and prefer to treat with over the counter medication.

None of the informants have had issues with domestic violence or heard of any women being physically abused by their partner/husband. Women who do not have a job mostly stay isolated inside their house. Some men do not allow their partner to meet with Thai friends. Some men do not allow their Thai partner/wife to work in the massage parlors as they do not want to be associated with the bad reputation. Women in this group found it difficult as they have financial commitments in Thailand and their partner/husband does not support their family members.

"*Swedish men do not understand that we Thai women have heavy financial burden. We all need to send money home*." She talked about herself as being among the luckier ones whose husband can't afford to support her financially but allowed her to work in a massage parlor. *"We can't speak the language and so where will we find a better job?".* Asked a 45-year-old parlor owner.

5.6 SERVICES AND SUPPORT NEEDED

Below are voices from the women expressing their needs for community and support:

Masseuses

"The target for support should be the new comers. I personally don't want any women to work in the massage business as it is difficult to stop. It is too attractive a job. When they are in the business they may not think about their future, education and other possible careers. "

"New comers must think how they will live in Sweden and the man may not be the good man you think. Women need to have some knowledge and skills to survive like haircutting, massage or nail or tattoo which are the jobs that do not require language."

"It really is a good idea to set up a more structured or consolidated communication channel between Thai women. At the moment there are different Facebook groups that were created to share information such as how to get a driving license, how to apply for a visa, etc."

"Information center for women. A person to help facilitate the communication between women and society. Online information in Thai. Hotline number in Thai."
"Orientation to the society is needed for the women."

Owners

"Need to have an information center where women could reach out for help without having a middle person to translate. Info dissemination through Thai massage parlors and friends.
Advice on family issues."

"Preparation prior to SFI course – Thais teaching Thais as orientation before entering into SFI."

FGDs

"Orientation for new comers and orientation at the SFI course."
"We need a Thai person who understands the Swedish law to assist women."

Aspiration

Almost all respondents who own a parlor said they will continue with the massage business. It is a good income and easy to manage this type of business. One of the owners decided to sell the remaining four of her parlors in the near future and move back to Thailand while the others want to find more stable and not so strenuous work.

None of the informants from the masseuse group expressed passion about their massage job. None of them wish to continue and do not see massage as their long-term career. They all wish to have a decent, full-time job, while some mentioned they want to go for higher education and then get a good job. One of the informants said, *"A massage job has unstable income, hard work, risk of sexual abuse by clients and most importantly a very small income for workers but good income for the owner."* Three of the informants said they wish to work as much as possible and save as much as money possible to pay the debt and then they wish to return home. The final person said, "*I want to change jobs as this type of massage is very strenuous and I start to get tired easily. But I don't know what to do."*

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Swedish government has framed prostitution and sex work as a form of gender inequality and violence against women, and men are identified as the predominant group perpetuating violence towards women through their demand for sexual services. The government's rationale posits that if the demand is reduced, or altogether eliminated, prostitution and sex work will end: no demand equals no incentive to sell services. However, this study shows that demand is consistently there. Buyers come in all shapes and sizes, married men looking for excitement, or socially awkward or unattractive people who are unsuccessful at dating and many others.

The massage industry in Malmö is a lucrative but exploitative business model. It essentially becomes a cycle: women experience a loss in wages and compensate for it by participating in riskier sexual services to keep an income going. Massage therapists are often seen as immoral people or as victims of unscrupulous traffickers who exploit the lack of opportunities of inhabitants of mostly poorer countries. Unfortunately, the Swedish public share these attitudes.

However, what should be addressed are the working conditions, rather than the nature, of the massage industry. These are often women with limited Swedish, lower education levels and limited understanding of Swedish society. The women in this industry have reported feeling neglected by the government and improved access to government and language is an important step in changing their status in society.

The researcher argues that a rights-based approach and a holistic perspective by public officials, policy makers, and researchers on Thai massage parlors is crucial for the improvement of the health and socio-economic wellbeing of them as well as Swedish public.

The researcher identified the following 17 possible recommendations for the government and Noomi. The following recommendations could be considered individually or together to develop a three to five-year project plan to tackle the issues facing women in the Thai massage parlors. The recommendations are based on discussion with the masseuses and parlor owners.

Work with the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok to disseminate information to women prior to their journey:

Preventing women falling victim to exploitation could start from the source country (Thailand). The study shows that women are often making an uninformed decision to come to Sweden. This lack of knowledge and experience puts women in a vulnerable position.

1. Develop an information package in Thai through social media such as Facebook. Information could include an introduction to Sweden as a country, migration, marriage and labour laws, and it could include videos involving Thai women who are living in Malmö sharing their life experiences, etc. The Embassy could require women to review these materials when they apply for visa as part of their preparation for the journey. Upon receiving their visa, the Embassy could consider providing a "Welcome to Sweden" handbook (see next section) and contact numbers in point 2 below.

2. Develop an emergency contact list of civil society organizations that work with Thai women throughout the country, for use when women need to reach out for support, or they have questions. The Embassy could hand this out to the women when they come to collect their visa, or this information could be part of the handbook mentioned above.

Establish an orientation center to welcome and assist new arrivals:

To ensure that women who are new to Malmö/Sweden are well informed and receive accurate information and necessary guidance.

3. Provide orientation to the new arrivals from a *local authority* and as soon as possible guide them to enroll in an SFI course.

   In Denmark, the government is providing orientation to new arrivals and it has been proved successful. Malmö municipality could consider replicating or adapting their working approach. Based on the Denmark model, the new arrival and their partner would be invited to the municipality on a monthly basis to be guided through the

system and discuss future plans, such as education or employment. The frequency of the visits can drop off as they establish themselves in society.

4. Develop a "Welcome to Sweden" handbook in Thai. The content could include basic information on all aspects about life in Sweden especially "Where to" or "How to" when encountering a problem. This information is to be provided to all Thai massage parlors and available to others on arrival. It could be made available online which could also be accessed by other Thais throughout the country. The handbook will have to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis as rules and policy change.

5. Local authorities could consider connecting the new arrival with Information Center (see recommendation 6). Staff at these Information Center could welcome the new arrivals and engage them in projects or activities and provide additional support/guidance if needed. It is important that the new comers get all the support they need and are guided in the right direction.

Support services for new comers:

The government could provide support services and cooperate with NGOs to establish channels through which to provide information on policies and procedures, and to facilitate access to services. These support services can also include measures to introduce/expand programs to support integration, develop language and other skills, and build support networks for the women. Specific recommendations are:

6. Establish an information center operating in Thai. This center will serve as a link between women and the local authorities (service providers) such as hospital, police, school, etc. Women who do not have sufficient language skills or feel uncomfortable reaching out to the authorities could contact the center. The center staff could then direct and connect women to the right services and if necessary, accompany the women as they go through the relevant process.

   In addition, the information center could serve many purposes. It could be used as a meeting center to provide information such as a "meet a lawyer day" where women have the opportunity to meet with a lawyer and ask questions, a place woman meet to exchange information, and it could be a place that also provides an introduction to Swedish language (see recommendation below on language), etc.

   Furthermore, the center should have an emergency plan, in case violations are identified by the women themselves, their friends, relatives or co-workers. The main point priority should be their ability to direct and assist women to relevant authorities

depending on the situation, such as abuse from employer, domestic abuse or abuse elsewhere.

7. Conduct regular outreach to the Thai massage parlors on the basic rights including rights to education and its benefits among women:

   A significant portion of woman in this sector who were not currently in school indicated that they were unsure whether they wanted to enter school; this represents an opportunity among this group to raise awareness of their rights to access school in Sweden, and of the benefits of education generally.

8. Develop and distribute a quarterly newsletter and online information through Facebook in Thai to keep women informed on the current situation, policies and regulations, etc. to be provided at Thai massage parlors. The Facebook page could reach a broader population.

9. Provide orientation into Swedish language classes.

   Thai women in general, but especially those who have a lower level of education, find it hard to learn Swedish. The first step would be a preparation course run by a Thai teacher who has both Swedish language skills and teaching skills to explain the structure of the language and provide training on the accent. This class could run in parallel with the SFI classes and be a supplementary class to boost the learning at SFI classes more effectively.

   In addition, there are currently several Thai women who provide ad hoc Swedish training through Facebook, which is popular among Thai women. These are useful, but they are not conducted by a trained teacher. There is potential to engage these women to create a more structured approach to teaching through this media. This could be very beneficial to women in the massage parlors as they could learn during their free time and it is beneficial to all Thais who are planning their journey to Sweden. This information could also be disseminated through the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok.

   Local schools that provide SFI courses should be informed of the initiatives and that they could inform their new students of this orientation language classes.

10. Support their integration into society.

    One of the ways to support women to engage and feel part of society is to connect them with Swedish people. Noomi could organize regular meet and greet activities that bring in Swedish volunteers to meet up with the women. The volunteers could be assigned to

be a mentor or 'buddy' for the women. The role of the volunteer is to help women practice their language and also guide them through the Swedish system and society. Such activities could be carried out at the information center.

11. Establish a reference group.

    In order to ensure a sustainable solution, the women need to be empowered to be their own agents of change. Parlor owners and masseuses should be invited to be a member of a reference group. The members will be trained on basic rights including labour rights and how to help others. Their role will be to support the outreach team to disseminate information regarding services and help answer some of the basic questions. They will be able to refer to the information center when questions are too technical. This group is the most important as they have the trust of the women working in this sector and they know where the parlors are, and the best way to reach them. They could also assist in data collection so Noomi can continue to update their information on the situation these women are facing.

12. Assist authorities to develop and maintain a record of women working in Thai massage parlors and ensure systematic collection.

    Information from the tax authority (Skatteverket) can be cross-referenced with that from the reference group and through Noomi's outreach activities. This would provide the Malmö municipality with a better basis on which to assess the size and nature of the migrant community, and plan and implement activities.

13. Support the Gender Equality Agency (GEA) initiative to campaign against sex buyers to provide campaign materials to massage parlors i.e. instructional films on how to deal with sex buyers. The campaign is being led by Realstars a local NGO who is the partner to the GEA.

14. Consider developing an advertising campaign explaining the penalties, because according to Swedish law, the penalty for purchasing sex services, or participating in prostitution is given to the purchaser.

15. Consider developing a human trafficking checklist to be used by inspectors who are inspecting Thai massage parlors. Currently, there are three agencies working together to inspect massage parlors, including Environmental Inspector (Miljöförvaltningen), Work Place Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljöverket), and Tax Authority (Skatteverket).

    Trafficking police have not yet been part of these inspections, which may be due to limited resources. A checklist based on the definition and the relevant laws could be

used by the team to spot potential risks of trafficking in massage parlors. The role of the inspection team is to assist police in a quick screening. Should there be an indication of human trafficking the information should be channeled to the trafficking police. Women who are working under a tourist visa should be given special attention and support as they are most likely victims of abuse.

16. Work with authorities and relevant non-governmental organizations to improve the working conditions of workers at Thai massage parlors, including a fair wage, right to paid leave or holiday compensation (semesterersättning) and especially support coordination to include Thai massage workers in labour unions. The current wage condition is one major factor as to why some women feel forced to deliver sex services. Thai massage parlor owners must be pressured to improve these conditions.

17. Further Research:
    a. Work with authorities to develop further research on the customers who frequent Thai massage parlors, particularly those parlors that provide happy endings.
    b. Mapping of fake marriage agencies, where and how they operate, and collect data on men who are targeted by these agencies to become “hosts”. Women may be paying substantial amounts to use these types of services and may become hostages of the agencies.
    c. Replicate the study in other big cities in Sweden in order to understand the scale of sexual services being provided and human rights violations on a national level.

Annex 1: Detailed operational guiding questions

INTERVIEW WITH OWNER

PROFILE

Informant code #: _____ Age:_____ Marital status_____#children_____

Type of visa: _____Education in Thailand: _____

Education in Sweden (include non-formal education): _____

Language proficiency: Thai _____Swedish _____English_____

The business

1. How did your parlor come about i.e. when did it start, etc?
2. Did you have previous experience in this business? Is it the first choice of business? Has other type of business or career been considered?
3. What do you like about massage business? What is your future plan for the business?
4. How many parlors do you own?
5. What is the profile of your customers?
6. What is the capacity of the parlor i.e. # of room and staff?
7. What are the challenges that you are facing in managing business?
8. Do you have other sort of income from business/job?
9. Do you also do massage?

Staff

10. How many staff do you employ? Are they full time staff or "on call"? What is their profile?
11. Recruitment policy and contract i.e. wages (fix/flex), working hours, benefit, holiday, etc?
12. Salary/payment arrangement?
13. What is their average income/day/month? Do they have to share tips with you? In average, how much tip each staff get/day/month?
14. In average, how many clients each of your staff serve/day? Is it sufficient?
15. What is the lowest and the highest number of client/day?
16. How do you deal with situation when you have less or no client? Do you provide compensation to you staff in anyway?
17. When do your staff take a fika break? How long/often?
18. What orientation do you provide to your staff prior to starting the job, if any?
19. Is there a rule/policy that staff have to follow?
20. What is the pattern of turn over, every two months/three months etc.? How do you address this issue?

Access to government services

21. Are you and your staff accessing government services? Do you and your staff go to hospital, school/SFI, etc? Do you and your staff get services you/they need? What are the challenges you and your staff face in terms of accessing government services? What are the services?

22. What support do they need to improve their future career? Should they pursue higher education for a more stable income, or should they continue to work in the parlor?
23. What support do you think your staff need in order to improve their living condition?

Happy Ending Policy

24. What is your policy on happy ending service?
25. Have you or your staff ever been harassed by customers? How do you deal with it? Have you ever considered report to the authority?
26. What kind of information about health and safety and training that you provide to your staff?

Image of Thai massage parlors

27. What is your opinion of the Thai massage business in Malmö?
28. What is your opinion about the negative image of the Thai massage in this community? What contribution could you made to improve the image?
29. Is there a mandatory regular health screening conducted in your workplace? Do staff have to go to the clinic?
30. What is your understanding of the Swedish law on offering sex services for money?

Recommendations for Government and Noomi:

31. What services/activities would you like to see?
32. What will be your participation/contribution in the project?
33. How can we encourage more participation from other women?

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

PROFILE

Informant code #: _____ Age:_____ Marital status_____#children_____

Type of visa: _____Education in Thailand: _____

Education in Sweden (include non-formal education): _____

Language proficiency: Thai _____Swedish _____English_____

1.BACKGROUND

1. Journey to Sweden (who help arrange and what cost associate? Transit country?)
2. Family in Thailand
3. Family situation in Sweden

2. BUSINESS MODEL

1. Is there a mandatory regular health screening conducted in your workplace? Do staff have to go to the clinic?
2. Number of employees at your current parlor?
3. How staff are recruited?
4. What is the pattern of turn over, every two months/three months etc.?
5. What background of other staff i.e. demographic profile, age group, ethnic/nationality? Are they the residence of Sweden? Do they have family? Do they have Swedish citizen?
6. How many are having tourist visa?
7. What is the role of owner?

3. WORKING & LIVING CONDITIONS

8. When did you start working as masseuse? Are you certify masseuse?
9. What is your original career?
10. Is the massage a promised job? Is it a preference job or how? What is your career plan?
11. How many massage parlors have you worked for? What reason for the changes?
12. What is the current working arrangement? Is this arrangement is the same with other parlors that you know of?
13. *This question is for those who enter as tourist.* Was there any third party arranging your travel/documents/work? If yes, what was the relation based on? (professional agency/member of family/friend/member of community, etc.) Did you pay any money to the recruiter in advance? If any travel costs were incurred before departure, who paid them?
14. Do you have written contract? What is included in the contract? Are you free to break the contract? Will there be any cost associate to do this?
15. Is the wage fixed or flexible? How is the wage pay i.e. how much, how often? Is it according to the agreement?
16. What is your average monthly income and expenditure per month?
17. In average, does your wage lower or higher than the amount of tips you get from customers?
18. Number of working hour/day/week? As you expected?
19. What kind of information about health and safety and training that you ever received from employer?

20. Do you have time off, holiday? Are you free to decide on this?
21. Do you keep your ID?
22. Do you work in more than one job?

4. CLIENTS & KNOWLEDGE ON HAPPY ENDING (HE)

23. Type of clients? Nationality, gender and age group?
24. What is your view on the massage job? Security? Reputation? Stability? Income?
25. When customer asked you to provide HA and if you don't want to do it what would you say or do?
26. Have you been asked to do the HA? By whom i.e. owner or customer? *Are you free to say yes or no? Will your employer be okay if you say no?*
27. Have you been sexually harassed by customer? If so, how did you deal with it?
28. In case you have done Happy Ending? Did you apply protective measure? What protection do you use? Are you concern about your health? Do you go for health check-up? If not, what prevent you?
29. What if client refused to use protection? What right do you have to protect yourself? What would you do?
30. If you have never done this, but have you consider doing it? Why? What is your view about HA?
31. What is your understanding of the law in regarding sex services in exchange of money?
32. In your job, are you at risk for sexual harassment?

Living conditions

33. What is the current living arrangement and cost associated to it?
34. If arrange by employer – Is it as you expected? What type of accommodation was provided? How much do you pay for the housing, if any? Are you allow to leave the place that you are living? Under what conditions? Are you allowed to have social contacts?

5. Health

35. Are you well informed of the government services? What are the services? Do you think you have the rights to those services?
36. Have you ever accessed health care services in the past two years? What are the services? What was your experience? Are you comfortable to access it on your own? Any obstacles?
37. What services are available in relation to sexual and reproductive health?
38. Are you aware of the services such as KST, Centrum för sexuell hälsa and Läkare i världen?
39. What health services do you need the most? Is this the same as other women working in this business? What are the common health issues among women in this business?
40. What need to be done to make the access easier to you and other women? What information do you need?
41. What is your understanding on the treatment fee? Cost for doctor visit?
42. Other concern?

6. Access to information

43. Where did you learn about government services and the laws in Sweden?
44. Would you like to improve your knowledge on relevant laws/policies or services? How could the government/Noomi help you with this?
45. Which communication channel would work best for you if we were to disseminate info to you i.e. Facebook, Line, information center, outreach/face-to-face visit, etc.?
46. When do you have time (morning, fika, after work, etc) for reading info from your social media communication?

7. Social services

47. Are you aware that there is a language class – SFI? Have you enrolled? If not, why? Is Swedish language important to you? What need to be done to support you for learning Swedish?

8. Immigration law

48. What is your understanding on the immigration law that related to your status in Sweden?

9. Women network

49. Is there a network among Thai women in massage industry? The objective of the network?
50. Peer-to-peer support? What form?

10. Remittance

51. Do you have bank account? How do you send money home?
52. Do you send on regular basis? How much? For who/what?
53. Do you have debt? How do you plan to pay off the debt?
54. Do you know how to declare your income tax? Who assist you?

Basic knowledge on services and barriers to access

11. Recommendations for Government and Noomi:

55. What services/activities would you like to see?
56. What will be your participation/contribution in the project?
57. How can we encourage more participation from other women?

12. Aspiration

58. What is your aspiration and future plan?
59. How do you see the massage job? Is long-term, secure for your future?
60. Have you considered pursue higher education and apply for more secure job? What prevention from pursing this? What support do you need?

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH MASSUES

Informant code# _____

Profile of women

1. What is the profile of women owning and working in the Thai massage parlors?

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

2. Are you well informed of the government services? What are the services? Do you think you have the rights to those services?
3. When you need to know about government services where do you normally get the information from? What challenges in accessing information?
4. Would you like to improve your knowledge and access to the government services? How could the government/Noomi help you with this?
5. Which communication channel would work best to communicate government services with you i.e. Facebook, Line, information center, outreach/face-to-face visit, etc.?
6. When do you have time (morning, fika, after work, etc) for reading info from your social media communication?

2. HEALTH

7. Have you ever accessed health care services in the last 2 months? What are the services? What was your experience? Are you comfortable to access it on your own? Any obstacles?
8. What services are available in relation to sexual and reproductive health?
9. Are you aware of the services such as KST, Centrum för sexuell hälsa and Läkare i världen
10. What health services do you and women in this business need the most?
11. What are the common health issues among women in this business?
12. What need to be done to make the access easier to you and other women? What information do you need?
13. What is your understanding on the treatment fee? Cost for doctor visit?
14. Is there any concern regarding access?

3. SOCIAL SERVICES

15. Are you aware that there is a language class – SFI? Have you enrolled? If not, why? Is Swedish language important to you? What need to be done to support you for learning Swedish?
16. Do you know about the Budget och skuldrågivningen, Malmö Stad?
17. What are the other services that you know of?
18. Would you like to access any of these supports?

4. IMMIGRATION LAW

19. What is your understanding on the immigration law that related to your status in Sweden?
20. What additional knowledge or information do you and other women need?

9. WOMEN NETWORK

21. Is there a network among Thai women in massage industry? The objective of the network?

22. Peer-to-peer support? What form?

10. BUSINESS MODEL

23. Number of employees per parlor? What is the size of the parlors?
24. How staff are recruited?
25. What is the pattern of turn over, every two months/three months etc.?
26. How many are having tourist visa? Is this group increasing?
27. What is the role of owner?

11. WORKING & LIVING CONDITIONS

28. When did you all start working as masseuses? What is your original career?
29. Is massage a preference job? What is your career plan?
30. Do you have written contract? What is included in the contract? Are you free to break the contract? Will there be any cost associate to do this?
31. Is the wage fixed or flexible? How is the wage pay i.e. how much, how often? Is it according to the agreement?
32. What is your average monthly income and expenditure per month?
33. In average, does your wage lower or higher than the amount of tips you get from customers?
34. Number of working hour/day/week? As you expected?
35. What kind of information about health and safety and training that you ever received from employer?
36. When do you take time off during the day? Plan for holiday?

12. CLIENTS & KNOWLEDGE ON HAPPY ENDING

37. Type of clients? Nationality, gender and age group?
38. What is your view on the massage job? Security? Reputation? Stability? Income?
39. What are the trends of Thai massage in Malmö?
40. When customer asked you to provide HE and if you don't want to do it what would you say or do? *Are you free to say no?*
41. Have you been sexually harassed by customer? If so, how did you deal with it?
42. Do you know if other women who does this? Does she use protection?
43. What is your understanding of the law in regarding sex services in exchange of money?
44. In the future, if you are harassed by customer do you know who to report? Will you report? Why?
45. In your job, are you at risk for sexual harassment? How do you protect yourself? What support do you need?

13. INTEGRATION INTO SOCIETY

46. What do you usually do during free time?

14. Recommendations for Government and Noomi:

47. What services/activities would you like to see?
48. What will be your participation/contribution in the project?
49. How can we encourage more participation from other women?

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ANNEX 3: SURVEY FORM

Date: ____ March 2019

Gender	Age	Marital status:	Customer of Thai Massage
▪ Male ▪ Female	▪ 20-25 ▪ 25-30 ▪ 30-35 ▪ 35-40 ▪ 40-45 ▪ 45-50 ▪ 50-55 ▪ 55-60 ▪ 60 and above	▪ Single ▪ Married ▪ Sambo/Särbo	▪ Yes ▪ No

1. Did you know there are more than 100 parlors in Malmö?
   - Yes
   - No

2. Do you think that this number reflects the demand?

3. Did you know 80% of parlors in Malmö provide HE services?

4. Do you agree that this business includes Happy Ending? Why?

ANNEX 4: INFORMATION SHEET & CONSENT FORMS

Preliminary Assessment
"A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE ON THE CONDITIONS OF WOMEN WORKING IN THE THAI MASSAGE INDUSTRY IN MALMÖ"

You have been given this information sheet because you are being invited to take part in a study. This information sheet describes the study and explains what will be involved if you decide to take part.

What is the purpose of this study?

Noomi is a local NGO based in Malmö established in 2015. It is a member of an umbrella organization called Hela Människan. The organization supports women who are exposed to violence. In 2017, Noomi started outreach work to Thai massage parlors to provide information and support. The pilot initiative provides support to Thai women working in five massage parlors and identified a series of issues, these range from a limited understanding of their own rights and no knowledge of how to access various government services.

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of the current situation of the Thai women and their living and working conditions. Noomi is looking to expand its work to support a larger group of Thai women in the Thai massage industry in Malmö. The outcome of this study will be used to design the next phase of the project.

What will participating in this study involve?

If you agree to participate in the project, you will be invited to take part in an interview. This will be a conversation about your experiences working in the massage parlors. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded but will not be kept unless you give permission. This is will be easier for me, so I can focus on our conversation and not have to take notes. However, if you don't want your interview to be recorded, I can take notes instead.

Do I have to take part?

No, it's completely up to you. If you agree to take part, you are free to change your mind at any time without needing to give a reason.

What will happen to any information I give?

Any information I have about you and everything you say in the interview will be kept confidential. Your name and contact details will be kept separately from the transcript and any details that could be used to identify you will be removed from the transcript. Any parts of your interview quoted in written work will be entirely anonymous.

What will be done with the results of the project?

The results of this study will be published and shared with local authorities and in presentations. Noomi will use the results to design future projects.

What are the other benefits of participating?

The benefits of participating are long-term. Participation in this study can help us better understand how Thai women face obstacles in accessing government services. This information will then be presented to the government to improve welfare. As for the organization, Noomi plans to raise funds for the project to promote potential help for Thai women in the future.

Contact details

If you wish to contact Noomi about the study or make a complaint, please contact: 040 632 3521

Thank you for taking part in this study and taking the time to read this information. If you are willing to be interviewed for this research project, please complete the consent form on the next page.

Consent form

- I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet provided for this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. ☐
- I understand that the interview will be digitally recorded and then transcribed. ☐
- I understand that information given in this interview may be used by the research team in future publications, reports or presentations. ☐
- I understand that any personal data that could be used to identify me will be removed from the transcript of my interview and that I will not be identified in any publications, reports or presentations. ☐

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study.

Your contribution is very much appreciated.