



Forced Sexual Exploitation of Cisgender Males and Transgender Individuals

Findings of a study by Ellie Newman-Grainger, July 2021

The Global Slavery Index estimates that 99% of victims of forced sexual exploitation are women, but research shows this figure is worryingly inaccurate. Cisgender men and boys and transgender victims are largely ignored by policymakers and researchers, despite research indicating these individuals actually account for approximately 30% of all victims of forced sexual exploitation. As a result, many cis males and trans individuals fall into cycles of exploitation, in part due to a lack of resources and appropriate support available to them.

Key research findings

A review of the literature on cis males and trans forced sexual exploitation has highlighted a significant knowledge gap in the field. We have found that there is little information on cis males in forced sexual exploitation specifically. Many sources stress that cis males are sexually exploited, but their exploitation is fluid in nature and often shifts between forced labour, forced criminality, and sexual exploitation. There is also a significant lack of research surrounding transgender victims of forced sexual exploitation. Where research does exist, almost all of the extant

literature medicalises transgender survivors, discussing them in relation to their likelihood of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, or other health injuries.

When discussing transgender survivors, transgender males were never explicitly included. Where transgender survivors are mentioned specifically, rather than counting them alongside all other LGBTQ+ survivors, articles specifically discuss transgender women rather than all transgender individuals or transgender males. While there is increasing acknowledgement that sexual exploitation of males and transgender individuals does exist, there is comparatively little academic research evaluating this issue.

While an increasing number of survivors are speaking out individually, through charities, or through survivor organisations, there is little theoretic analysis of their position in society, their vulnerabilities, and their survivorship.

Why is this important?

Literature demonstrates that many cis males and transgender survivors of forced sexual exploitation are unable to access adequate support services, largely due to gendered norms and discrimination. Many cis males report feeling 'emasculated' by the police, who have questioned their validity as a victim due to their gender. Transgender people have also reported similar discrimination, with survivors experiencing gender denial when reporting to law enforcement. Many cis male and transgender survivors are therefore reluctant to engage with the police concerning their experiences, and are subsequently less likely to be identified as victims of forced sexual exploitation or to receive meaningful assistance and support.



Recommendations for policy makers?

- Suggestions voiced by cis male and transgender survivors is that they should play a more fundamental role in informing policy.
- For transgender survivors, gender-affirming healthcare and legal assistance in changing gender markers on identification documents should form an essential component in rehabilitation processes.
- Community based support systems should be easily available to all survivors. These support systems should also be distinct from law enforcement.

Research overview

Currently, even though the G20 has a nine-step plan to combat all forms of modern slavery, this does very little to account for cis males and boys, and transgender individuals who are sexually trafficked. Much of the anti-slavery work focuses on either cis males in manual labour exploitation or cisgender women in sexual slavery. These are treated as two distinct categories, and there has been little research to account for cis males in forced sexual exploitation, and an even smaller amount of research accounting for the trafficking of transgender individuals.

Lack of justice for cis male and trans survivors

The result of this lack of research and awareness is a distinct lack of justice for cis male and trans survivors of sexual slavery. Many cis males and trans individuals are unable to access help from law enforcement due to the belief that only

cisgender women and girls can be sexually exploited. Moreover, services that do exist to rehabilitate survivors are tailored towards the cis female experience, thereby implicitly excluding trans women, trans males, and cis males.

This exclusion of cis males and trans individuals creates a significant minority of 'hidden victims', who, due to their inability to access support services, are not reflected in official statistics or policymaking. This only serves to deepen the belief that forced sexual exploitation is a (cisgender) female issue, creating a system of exclusion for cis males and trans survivors.

Implementation of inclusive and effective policy

Dr Andrea Nicholson is undertaking research in the Rights Lab that seeks to contribute the nascent research surrounding forced sexual exploitation of cis males and trans individuals. This research will ensure that sexual exploitation of cisgender males and boys and transgender individuals is seen, understood, and addressed by policymakers.

The research will also highlight ways in which support can be exclusionary to cis males and transgender survivors and suggest ways in which this could be rectified in order to help those survivors access appropriate support services and reduce instances of re-exploitation.

Exploring this field outside of the prevalent female dynamic will allow for a fuller understanding of how forced sexual exploitation affects the individual, rather than focusing solely on (cis) females, and will help to inform more inclusive and effective policy.