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Making the Invisible Visible: Boys and Men in the Sex Trade

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The invisibility of boys and men

- The expansion of the global sex industry (now estimated to be worth between \$20 billion and \$100 billion per annum) has emerged as a key policy, legal and academic concern
- However, debates have tended to focus on the status and experiences of women and girls in the sex industry
- As such, boys and men (and indeed transgender people) remain largely invisible in academic, policy and legal discussions

A significant sector

- The focus on women and girls is often justified on the grounds that the vast majority of people selling sex are female
- Rarely is substantive empirical evidence offered to support this (in part due to the lack of data)
- Yet some evidence suggests that the number of boys and men in the sex trade may be considerably greater than is often assumed

Different for boys?

- Studies show that many young males enter the industry from situations of extreme vulnerability
- For example, young male street-workers are relatively likely to have experienced child sexual abuse and continue to be at relatively high risk of sexual assault
- But in many countries little support is available

Reframing debates

- Policy, legal and academic debates need to be explicitly and consistently reframed to take account of boys, men and transgender people in the sex trade
- Debates about ‘gender violence’ have helped to highlight how many people in the sex industry are victims of sexual exploitation, but may run the risk of excluding important groups of people