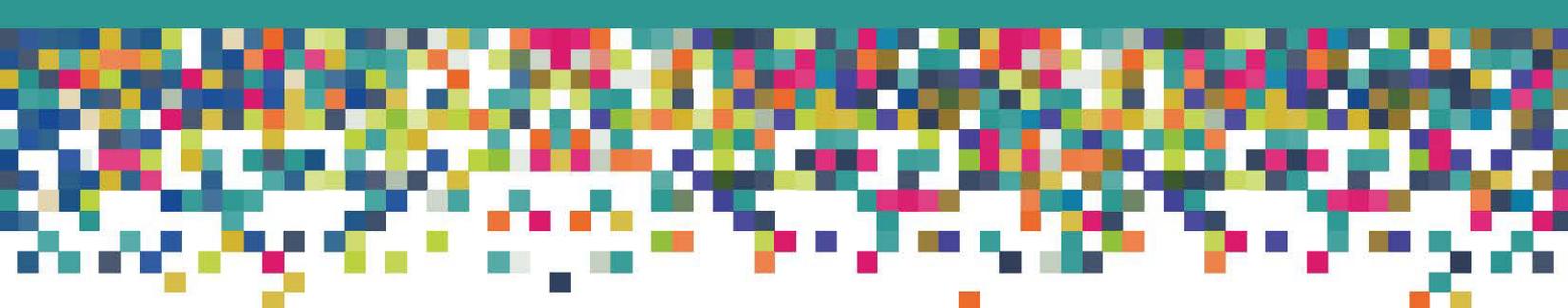




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## **SOLIDIFYING SOCIAL IMMOBILITY**

Representation of Sex Workers within Human Trafficking  
Discourse in the Philippines

**OLIVIA AUSTRIA KEMBLE**



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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the social construction of sex work according to anti-trafficking discourse of the Philippines. Through a critical analysis of text, the state, institutional church, and development community are evaluated and questioned for their efficacy in representing sex workers' experiences within national contexts. Seven institutional texts are selected from the official websites for each discursive actor. Within each text, the representation of human trafficking is investigated, as it excludes considerations of FSWs' agency and negotiated views on exploitation in entering the sex industry. Through the construction of criminality and the prescription of victimhood, the institutions present a 'preferred narrative' of sex work which reproduces the socioeconomic conditions which presuppose women entering the sex industry. In discussion, I critique Philippine dialogue on human trafficking for failing to formulate its long-term solution. This case study, which lays at the intersection of the nation's modernizing efforts, international interaction, and struggle to preserve cultural values, points to the current faults in the institutional representation of sex work—the consequences of which implicate the nation's goals of gender development and structural equality.*

### INTRODUCTION

Despite the nation's official criminalization of sex work, the Philippines is home to countless go-go bars, brothels, and other adult entertainment venues especially in globalized destinations like Manila, Cebu City, and Olongapo. The prevalence of the sex market is reflected online, where the nation is unofficially constructed as a sex tourist's haven. Articles like "Best Cities in the Philippines to Get Laid"<sup>1</sup> or "Complete Guide to Girly Bars in Davao"<sup>2</sup> are examples of the presentations of sex work found on internet chat forums and blogs. Beyond its informal reputation, the Philippines' market for sexual commerce has gained particular attention from anti-trafficking projects of the humanitarian community. Responding to international representations of trafficking and exploitation of women, the Philippine government aggressively partakes in the anti-trafficking movement. In effect, anti-trafficking discourse is structurally implemented into the nation's public institutions.

Analyzing the heightened war on trafficking, or what is termed as "sexual humanitarianism" (Kotiśwaran, 2014), many academics critique humanitarian-based representations of sex work for their reducing application of human trafficking and victimhood narratives (Hill, 2018; Chang, 2007; Forringer-Beal, 2022). These representations complicate the work environment of female sex workers (FSWs), increase their structural vulnerabilities, and challenge women's agency via prescribed victimhood. Andrijasevic & Maj (2016) explore the ironic role of sexual humanitarianism in the reproduction of structural inequality by theorizing how these representations fail to frame victims as products of neoliberal globalization. Instead, according to neoliberal narratives, the gendered development outcome of migrant FSWs is understood as an 'exception' to the system of neoliberalism which claims its loyalty to equally distributed economic development (Cheng & Kim, 2014; Wearing & Wearing, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> "Best Filipino Cities to Get Laid." *Dream Holiday Asia*,  
<https://dreamholidayasia.com/destination/philippines-guide/best-filipino-cities-to-get-laid/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Complete Guide to Girly Bars in Davao." *Philippines Redcat*, August 2023,  
<https://www.philippinesredcat.com/girly-bars-in-davao/>.

Within the globalized arena which neoliberalism has created, migration and entrance into the sex industry is negotiated by workers' perceptions of modern lifestyle and social mobility—conditions which are otherwise inaccessible considering the lack of opportunity most impoverished women face in the Global South. Priorities of modern lifestyles and sustainable income shape sex workers' understandings of agency and exploitation (Andrijasevic & Maj, 2016). However, the exercise of agency which FSWs demonstrate in entering the sex industry lacks recognition within anti-trafficking discourse. Consequentially, the realities of this population are misconstrued by institutional dialogue which prefers the sanctity of neoliberal development as opposed to reflexive identification of the role of neoliberalism in the perpetuation of the sex industry (see: Eder, 2015; Emmons, 2019; Shah, 2003; Nguyen-Vo, 2012).

The investigation of anti-trafficking discourse of the Philippines—as it is produced by the state, institutional church, and development community—is the purpose of this study. Specifically, I am interested in how the sex industry is socially constructed through the representation of human trafficking and the role this dialogue plays in reproducing the socioeconomic conditions which presuppose women entering the sex industry. Therefore, this research focuses on the grey space in which sex workers exist, simultaneously victimized *and* criminalized by the church and state while also influenced by the forces of globalization and systemic inequality.

### THEORETICAL CHAPTER

Gender is understood as a critical starting point by multiple scholars who approach the discussion of sex work. Following this route, I will explore gender ideology in the Philippines as a departure point for contextualizing the national representation of sex work. Next, I explore the nation's attitudes towards the sex industry as simultaneously stigmatizing and victimizing via anti-prostitution and anti-trafficking campaigns. Lastly, I examine Philippine development discourse to contextualize the institution's neoliberal priorities and how it relates to the sex industry. Combining the literature, I aim to show how FSWs in the

Philippines exist at the intersection of structural inequality, constructed victimhood, and neoliberal-led globalization.

### Gender, Labor, and the Force of Domesticity

Social structure is stubbornly patriarchal in the Philippines—women’s societal roles are stereotypically attributed to the home and characterized by a sense of domesticity. The perpetuation of gender roles is linked to the Philippine’s cultural emphasis on traditional family structures—a manifestation of the Catholic Church’s political influence (Ruiz Austria, 2004). As expected, the nation’s founding documents reproduce this construction of family. Consider the 1986 Constitution which solidifies the cultural importance of family values: “The State recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation. Accordingly, it shall strengthen its solidarity and actively promote its total development” (Article XV, Section 1). Sanctity of family as part of Filipino identity<sup>3</sup> come in conflict with modernizing efforts which encourage women’s labor participation. With the feminization of the labor market, women’s traditional roles within the family become threatened. Therefore, deliberation of female participation in the Philippine workforce hinges upon balance of domestic duties. The 1987 Family Code further solidifies the Philippine conceptualization of family, as it normalizes notions of motherhood based on women’s presence in the household and good moral grounding for the sake of their children (Exec. Order No. 209, Article 213). The feminization of the workforce then becomes challenged on two different fronts. First, the feminization of labor comes in conflict with the traditional household role of women. Second, female labor participation challenges women’s motherly duties.

The cultural construction of gender roles shapes the labor market for women, constraining employment to ‘feminine’ forms of labor with discriminatory wages. The current experience of gendered labor divisions and its role in women’s social immobility in the Philippines is theorized and labeled the ‘domesticity of women’ by Parreñas (2008). Importantly, Parreñas

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<sup>3</sup> The conceptualization of family being the core of the nation will be returned to later, not only does it influence labor trends but it also serves utility in the criminalization of sex work.

challenges the Philippines' claim of women's newfound economic power and questions the quantified representation of female participation in the labor market. Ultimately, Parreñas posits, this rhetoric is misrepresentative of average women, as the *type* of work available is strictly limited to low-wage and low-skill sectors. Low-wage labor is the allure of the Philippines in the global economy—therefore, this condition of female labor is strategically and structurally maintained. In effect, this strategy preserves neoliberal interests of transnational business and the resulting “rush to the bottom.”

The force of domesticity is crucial in framing my study, as it contextualizes FSWs as individuals who exercise agency and find increased social mobility in entering the sex industry. In this way, mainstream conceptions of agency and exploitation in the sex industry are challenged—a tension which is expected to present itself within my investigation of discourse. Parreñas offers a unique insight into the force of domesticity in the Philippines, however her discussion pertains to the formal economy and its grey areas, specifically concerning female remittance workers overseas. What I would like to offer in my investigation, is the exploration of how gender inequality is represented in the informal labor market within the nation's borders. Specifically, I will discuss how in the face of social immobility, women obtain more sustainable lifestyles by entering the informal economy where sex work is situated.

### Immoral Deviancy vs. Prescribed Victimhood: Narrative Dichotomy of the Sex Industry

By estimate, 800,000<sup>4</sup> sex workers operate within the Philippines, making the prevalence of the sex industry clear. How, then, does the nation respond? On one hand, the Philippines combats prostitution via its criminalization in the *Revised Penal Code*. The definition of prostitution put forth by the penal code is of interest because of its assumptions of *who* its

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<sup>4</sup>Source: <https://www.awointernational.de/en/our-work/countries-and-regions/southeast-asia/philippines/fight-against-sexual-exploitation-of-girls-and-women-in-davao>

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culprit is: the crime is committed when a *woman*, specifically, indulges in “sexual intercourse or lascivious conduct” for money or profit (Article 202). Furthermore, the document hinges its logic on the act’s perpetuation of “immoral doctrines,” constructing prostitution as a crime because of its perceived threat to society’s moral integrity. Accordingly, women who sell sexual services are punished as criminals and stigmatized as immoral deviants of society. Alternative to (and in tension with) the criminalizing narrative of sex workers, exists the “progressive” rhetoric of anti-trafficking and victimhood. Consider the Magna Carta of Women (2008) which labels prostitution as an act of violence against women and insists on women’s protection from this force. This document builds upon the victimized status of sex workers as presented in the *Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act* of 2003, which solidifies trafficking as the deliberate exploitation of one’s vulnerability, including for prostitution. Philippine anti-trafficking policies did not happen in a vacuum. Instead, they are national implementations of universal anti-trafficking discourse, as it became prevalent at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the creation of organizations like the UNODC. On a national and international scale, these seemingly progressive anti-trafficking policy actions blur the line of agency within understandings of sex work and problematically universalize assumptions of victimhood.

Given the dichotomous construction of sex work in the Philippines, FSWs are narrowly understood as criminals who degrade society’s moral value *or* victims of trafficking and exploitation. Identifying this adverse relationship is necessary in examining the nation’s weaknesses and limitations in its response to sex work. As Parmanand (2021) notes, it is within the narrow understanding of the sex industry that FSWs are left vulnerable to harassment, extortion, and violence. Therefore, understanding the interaction between these discursive constructions of the sex industry and the realities of sex workers is crucial for evaluating the institutional discourse of this study.

NGOs like GABRIELA (General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action) and the Philippine Sex Workers Collective reject the narrative dichotomy of sex work in advocating for the recognition of women’s agency within the industry. However, sex worker’s empowerment organizations which deviate from mainstream representations of sex work often experience discrimination and violence by the

state (Parmanand, 2019). Concerning FSWs' rights, one notable legislative amendment is in progress. The Philippine Commission of Women proposes the *Anti-Prostitution Law* which shifts the prosecution of prostitution to purchasing parties. This initiative represents the optimistic potential for the state to recognize the Philippines' structural inequalities as they influence FSWs and construct victimhood. However, this proposal receives mixed reception, as it lacks formulation of agency and advocates FSWs' relocation in the formal labor market as serving their best interests.

Public hostility towards sex workers' rights and the rigidity of mainstream narratives is a manifestation of the nation's fundamentalist background. Contemporarily, Catholicism is regarded as the "cornerstone of Filipino identity" and makes its way into various political movements (Shirley, 2000). Consequentially, political action is commonly motivated by the protection of pious morals—a trend referred to as 'morality politics' (Cornelio & Lasco, 2020). Morality politics is helpful in understanding the stigmatization of FSWs' agency. The criminalization of prostitution is rooted in its degradation of traditional family values on one hand. The influence of which is present in the 1987 Family Code which explicitly outlines the "wrongs" of motherhood. On the other hand, criminality is constructed based on the sex industry's conflict with Catholic values of chastity and monogamy. Moral politics influence the Philippines *Revised Penal Code* which includes various "crimes against chastity" (adultery, seduction, acts of lasciviousness, etc.), criminalizing extramarital sexual behavior and reinforcing the sanctimonious understanding of marriage. The inclusion of ideas of chastity and familial duty within the nation's foundational documents represents the entanglement of religious values and state legislation. The normalizing function of these documents presents multiple grounds on which sex work is rejected and stigmatized due to its degradation of Catholic (and therefore, national) morals.

### Neoliberalisation, Tourism, and Global Cities: contributing to an environment for Sex Work

In the aftermath of Marcos's regime which left major international debt and an economic recession in its wake, economic liberalization, deregulation, and globalization as development

strategy were introduced to stimulate economic growth and alleviate poverty (Ramos, 2021; Jurado, 2003). Despite these initiatives to ‘modernize,’ many note the widening of class divides and the slowly increasing prevalence of impoverishment (Clausen, 2010; Rutkowski, 2015; Uy-Tioco, 2019). The Asian Development Bank, for example, ranks the Philippines as 4<sup>th</sup> most impoverished nation within Southeast Asia (ADB, 2009: 19). Considering the trend of neoliberalism in tandem with the widening of socioeconomic divides, it is important to understand the way Philippine development schemes may have unequal and gendered consequences.

Let us consider ‘global cities,’ where transnational economic structures situate themselves (Sassen, 1991). These destinations of foreign direct investment (FDI) are thought to be catalysts for their nation’s economy, as it attracts foreign business and skilled internationals (Goldman & Longhofer, 2009). Therefore, the investment in the infrastructure of the city itself becomes a development strategy of neoliberal states. The global city is conceptually useful in understanding major urban centers in the Philippines including (but not limited to) Manila, Subic Bay, Quezon City and Bonifacio Global City. Global cities often impact the organization of national labor markets; the rise in demand for low-wage labor in tandem with the high concentration of employment opportunities in global cities results in large-scale migration from rural areas to urban centers (Cuervo & Hin, 1998; Landis, 2008). This rapid urbanization is influenced by the scarce employment opportunities in rural Philippines.

Regardless of the development community’s proclaimed benefits of global cities, these environments are also correlated with the heightened demand for sexual commerce—a trend resulting from the influx of business travelers and expatriates in global cities (Hwang, 2017). Nothing makes this correlation clearer than the notorious sex market in Olongapo Bay which is littered with girl bars specifically catering to expatriates and tourists (Chapman, 2017; Hawkins, 2022; Moselina, 1979). FSWs within popular sex tourist towns like Subic Bay and Sabang usually fall into the category of migrant workers, relocated from rural areas to enter the industry, which reflects the demands of globalized urban spaces (Ekoluoma, 2017; Reyes, 2019).

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Catering to the global market for leisure and following neoliberal suggestions, the state supports tourism as a major development initiative (Schilcher, 2008; Telfer & Sharpley, 2015). This developmental outlook renders global cities inherently touristic, which creates another globalizing channel beyond expatriates and business travelers based on pleasure and leisure. Interestingly, the Philippines is not typically regarded as a high-flow tourist location compared to more popular destinations of Southeast Asia. ASEAN's 2017 tourism inbound flows records Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia as the highest ranking in terms of incoming tourists at 35.4 million, 25.9 million, and 14 million respectively. In comparison, the Philippines received 6.6 million visitors in the same year. Nonetheless, the tourism sector remains focal in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP). Tourism as a development strategy is specifically emphasized in the PDP of 2023-2028, in which the subsidization of the tourism sector is highlighted as a 'driver of inclusive growth.' The state promotion of tourism is no novelty; instead, it is a continuation of a trend supported by a long line of preceding PDPs. The state even supports a specialty branch, the Department of Tourism (DOT) which is responsible for implementing the PDPs strategies of tourism for development and promoting the nation as a tourist destination. Given its importance in developmental policy, the discourse of the tourism sector will be examined as a branch of neoliberal development.

The tourism industry simultaneously constrains and transforms the environment for the female work force. This force interacts with the labor market which is already limited by gendered divisions. Through this interaction, a myriad of labor options become available in the informal labor market as a 'sustainable' alternative for women in search of social mobility. By nature, however, these jobs (including sex work, for example) perpetuate the gendered realities of the Philippines and transnational exploitations of power. Truong theorizes the connection between tourism for development and sexual commerce as an "articulation of a series of unequal social relations including North-South relations, relations between capital and labour, male and female, production and reproduction" (Truong, 1990). Furthermore, Pettman (1997) recognizes the inherent exoticization associated with sex tourism, explaining how "sex tourist destinations are represented in terms of culturalized and sexualized difference as exotic and erotic" (96). Accordingly, the labor consequences of neoliberal-led

globalization and tourism for development initiatives become a crucial point in contextualizing the sex industry, especially within the Global South.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This essay is not concerned with whether sex work should or should not be criminalized, but rather, how the representation of sex work reflects and reproduces unequal development outcomes in the Philippines. Furthermore, the sex industry's institutional representation is critiqued as a matter needing redress, as its inadequacies implicate the development of women and leave them vulnerable to various forms of exploitation and exclusion.

From the literature, I have identified the following main themes:

1. Sex work in the Philippines must be understood in tandem with the force of domesticity. In contextualizing the phenomena this way, sex work is realized as an outcome of the gendered labour market and substantial economic pressures felt by women in the Philippines.
2. Agency is unrecognized in the mainstream understandings of sex work which construes FSWs narrowly as immoral deviants or helpless victims. These conflicting narratives complicate the environment of FSWs and exacerbate their vulnerabilities.
3. Sexual commerce is correlated with the current neoliberal development strategy in the Philippines. More specifically, it is within globalized spaces of high FDI and tourism where sex work thrives. The avoided self-reflection on neoliberalism's gendered consequences in development discourse reproduces the conditions which influence the supply and demand of sexual labour.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study contributes to the fields of gender and development studies by theorizing how the sex industry is a gendered consequence of neoliberal development in the Philippines. I outline how the nation's response to the sex industry fails to account for its underlying social causes,

ironically making the Philippines complacent in the perpetuation of the industry. This case which lays at the intersection of the nation's modernizing efforts, international dependence, and struggle to preserve cultural values, points to the current faults in the representation of sex work which challenges capabilities of human development.

Despite the criminalization and stigmatization of the industry, sexual commerce will remain a thriving industry unless the influence of the toxic relationship between the nation's development schemes and structural gender inequalities are realized. It is this relationship which must be mended to progress women's developmental capabilities. Therefore, the purpose of this research is also a call to action to alleviate the social forces which, i) simultaneously push women into an exploitive industry and, ii) render them vulnerable to its exploitative outcomes. Throughout this research, the state's culpability is highlighted in preserving these forces while also claiming its progressive alignment with women's rights, all while ignoring the crisis of reality which sex workers experience.

What follows will be led by my leading research questions:

**RQ1:** *How is sex work in the Philippines represented through anti-trafficking discourses of the state, institutional church and development community?*

**RQ1.2:** *What extent does this narrative exclude the realities of FSWs?*

**RQ1.3:** *How does this narrative reproduce gender inequality and implicate gender development?*

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Methodological Approach

This study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as it generally concerns the multidisciplinary investigation of discursive "dimensions of power abuse and the injustice and inequality that results from it" (Van Dijk, 1993: 252). The consideration of power is crucial to this method, as power is considered part of the discourse itself—power and discourse are

different but not discrete elements. Discourse can be 'internalized' in power and the complex realities of power relations can be 'condensed' in discourses (Harvey, 1996). Therefore, studying discourse in this way involves the investigation of how language can dominate, discriminate, and maintain power and control (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In this respect, discourse is understood as a social phenomenon—discourse is influenced by social context and (re)produces ideology within society, meaning it is both shaped by and shapes society (Van Dijk, 1993, 2008).

Elements of classic Foucauldian CDA influence this analysis, especially in relations to the understanding of power/knowledge through Foucault's theorization of biopower in categorizing the individual and imposing a law of truth on them (Foucault, 1983). Through considerations of biopower, I analyze how the Filipina body is a subject of intersectional narratives presented by public institutions of the Philippines.

Specific to this study, I employ CDA as "form of critical research which seeks to understand how contemporary capitalism in some respects enables but in other respects prevents or limits human well-being and flourishing, with a view to overcoming or mitigating these obstacles and limits" (Fairclough, 2010: 11). Given my focus on capitalistic globalization via neoliberal policy, I find the conceptual utility of CDA put forth by Fairclough to be particularly helpful. Accordingly, CDA is essential in the political struggle to resolve existing crisis, as it is able to "transform social forms and social life in ways which advance human well-being" (Fairclough, 2010: 12).

FSWs currently exist in crisis, as they are ignored by development initiatives and bare the exploitive consequences of neoliberal globalization. CDA, therefore, is used as a tool in evaluating and finding potential paths of resolution to this crisis. It will pick apart interacting dialogue of Philippine public institutions in order to analyze how power is maintained through discourse, and how this discourse shapes society.

### Analytical Framework

I employ Fairclough's three-dimensional approach (1995) which aids in the systematic investigation of discourse according to its textual, discursive, and societal levels. These dimensions are understood as follows:

*Textual:* Lexical elements of the text will be analyzed which includes syntax, grammar, sentence structure, tone, and verb tense. Specifically, I will look at the textual choices in representing sex work in a criminalizing and victimizing way.

*Discursive:* A text may discretely communicate assumptions or motivations. In analyzing a text's discursive dimension, the textual elements are interpreted according to social explanation. I focus on intertextuality and argument structure which constructs meaning across time and space.

*Social:* This dimension analyzes reproduction of power through knowledge based on the knowledge which is privileged, silenced, or legitimated. At the societal level of my CDA, I combine textual and social dimensions to offer an explanation of this study's findings in relation to overarching theories and ideologies.

### Sampling

Purposeful sampling was utilized in creating my sample set. This sampling method is adopted from Patton's (2002) academic contributions which present purposeful sampling as the selection of "information-rich cases for study of depth" from which "one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry" (230). With Patton's operationalization in mind, I will sample each institution for texts in which sex work is represented. My sample set will be temporally constrained to the six-year period of Duterte's Presidency (2016-2022). The temporal criteria was put in place due to the potency of national anti-trafficking discourse during the Duterte presidency. Additionally, the temporal criterion was influenced by the desire for a rich and representative sample set. Given the inconsistent records of public statements and official documents from all three subsamples and my inability to physically access the Philippines' national archives, I purposefully sampled cases

out of those which were available from the official internet archives of each institution. Sampling from a six-year period ensured the relevance and purpose of samples. The state, church and development institutions were selected as sub-sample sets due to their influence and power over sex workers in the Philippines. Given their authority, these institutions have high access to discourse, and therefore high control of power (Van Dijk, 1993)—this characteristic makes them rich sources to evaluate through CDA.

*Institutional Church:* Two texts have been sampled from the Catholic Bishop Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and its suborganization, the Philippine Interfaith Movement Against Trafficking (PIHMAT). These official statements were selected, as they highlight the institutional church's main attitude which emphasizes the violent criminality of human trafficking and the disempowered positions of its victims.

PIHMAT is a cooperative effort against trafficking, representing all religious organizations regardless of their faith. It cannot be considered directly representative of the Catholic Church. However, the influence of Catholicism is strongly suggested considering the CBCPs leading role in the organization and the fact that 78.8% of the national population identifies as Roman Catholic.<sup>5</sup>

Catholic ideals are influential in the discussion of the sex industry as explored within the literature—therefore, its representation within PIHMAT's sample is expected. Nonetheless, given the cooperative interfaith characteristic of PIHMAT, I will refer to the church's discourse in the macro as 'institutional church' as opposed to in the micro identification of the Catholic Church.

*Philippine State:* Republic Act No. 11862 of the Philippines along with the Philippine Commission on Women's Policy Brief No. 9 have been chosen in sampling the state discourse pertaining to sex work. These documents have been purposefully selected as they present the

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<sup>5</sup> Statistic provided by the Philippine Statistics Authority's 2020 Census on Population and Housing

state's aggressive policing measures and alignment with international narratives in its anti-trafficking commitments.

*Development Community:* The Philippines Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022: Chapters 10, 11, and 18 have been sampled due to their relevance in outlining the development community's response to sex work and outlook on human development. In addition, two official pieces of press have been selected from the Philippine Department of Tourism (DOT) which are rich in examples of overlapping tourism for development and gender development ideology.

### Limitations and Considerations for Future Research

This study utilizes Rodrigo Duterte's presidency as a temporal point of focus within the Philippines' extensive dialogue on sex work. As explained, this choice was made due to the strong presence of anti-trafficking discourse within church, state and development institutions within this six-year period. Although findings may suggest some correlation with Duterte's national strategy, further research would be required to posit any definitive patterns specific to the regime.

Ideally, further temporal restrictions would be set to ease the process of sampling and narrow the contextuality in which the discourse must be considered. However, I was limited by the fact that the institutions of focus lack online archives of published documents. Instead, only a selection of documents are published or made available online. Furthermore, I do not have access to the nation's physical archives of institutional dialogue, as my research is not being completed on Philippine soil. Therefore, I was tasked with creating a diverse and information-rich sample set given what is accessible via the online databases of each discursive actor. In effect, a six-year period spanning across Duterte's presidency allowed the sampling of each source of interest and ensured the relevancy of chosen texts.

### Ethics and Reflexivity

Given the nature of CDA, as it presents a specific interpretation of discourse which may be read multiple different ways, one may critique this research as subjective. However, my job

in the implementation of CDA, is simply to provide an interpretation which challenges the mainstream mode of discourse and highlight its potential faults in the reproduction of dominance. It is not my job to offer my interpretation as a “correct” alternative.

The research methodology of this dissertation has been submitted and approved by an appointed research supervisor. In addition, this research is backed by an approved ethics form under the guidelines of the London School of Economics.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In findings, sex work does not exist as a topic of itself within institutional dialogue. Instead, it is constructed as a subtopic within the system of human trafficking. Given this categorization within a higher crime of trafficking, agency becomes incompatible as victimhood is rigidly constructed for FSWs. As a result, the securitization of livelihood women may find in the sex industry is delegitimized, stigmatized, and criminalized.

### Institutional Church Discourse

The institutional church has access to public opinion formation given its political influence and strong association with Filipino identity, both characteristics which are crucial for contextualizing its discourse in this study. Two documents were sampled as cases of the institution’s discursive construction of the sex industry. One statement directly represents the national Catholic Church produced from the Catholic Bishop Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). The second document comes from the Philippine Interfaith Movement Against Trafficking (PIHMAT), which heavily aligns with Catholic representations of sex work.

### Lexical Style

The church utilizes harsh lexical choices in its statements against human trafficking, communicating the extreme stigma attached to the sex industry. As the industry is discursively constructed to be synonymous to the crime of human trafficking, words and phrases like ‘death and destruction,’ ‘evil,’ and ‘nightmare’ are employed. The connotations of this lexical styling emphasize the moral threat posed by human trafficking. Beyond the

lexical construction of moral criminality, structured wording aids in the representation of sex workers as disempowered individuals. Both texts share the framing of FSWs in victimhood given their usage of disempowered words like 'voiceless,' 'victim,' 'vulnerable.' These choices in wording help accentuate the church's representation of FSWs as helpless victims who must be saved, a narrative which will be explored in the following paragraphs.

### Appeal to Identity

In discussing sex work, the church states its moral opposition by relating to the associated crime of human trafficking. Rhetorically, this argumentation is accomplished by appealing to the religious and familial aspects of Filipino identity. Consider Text A, in which the church establishes sentiments of solidarity in its anti-trafficking movement:

Though all may come from different faith or religion, the passion and eagerness to cease human trafficking in the Philippines binds us together. United in faith through service and advocacy, we can provide justice and restore the dignity of the oppressed (Text A: 4).

The production of solidarity in support of the anti-trafficking campaign is significant; it solidifies the criminalizing preferred narrative of sex work as a normalized construction for subscribers of the institution. In being a member of the church, it is one's duty to join the fight against human trafficking. Similarly, the duty of Catholic citizens in the fight against human trafficking is accentuated by Text B in which the church refers to human trafficking as a "scourge upon the Body of Christ" (2). In this case, dominant narratives of human trafficking are reproduced by followers of the church out of respect and protection of their faith.

Aside from religious appeals to identity, the church constructs the urgency of its anti-trafficking movement by calling upon the familial commitments of Filipino identity, proposing the family's imperilment by sex work. The church outlines the danger which human trafficking poses to the family by constructing the emotional strain such a crime causes: the "family suffers separation and agonizes over the uncertainty of its illegally recruited

family member” (Text B: 2). Framing human trafficking as a degradation to familial values logicizes its rejection according to the preferred narrative of the church.

By appealing to the fundamental aspects of Filipino identity, the church frames sex work as a source of ill in the family and in the church. What follows from this rhetoric, is a call to action to defend the protected institutions of Filipino culture from the dangers of human trafficking. In turn, it becomes a religious duty to support the institution’s fight against trafficking. Throughout this discursive process, alternative understandings of the sex industry are delegitimized, especially those which recognize the agency of women in entering the industry. These narrative deviations are suppressed by the solidarity found in supporting the institutional church’s anti-trafficking movement.

### Root of the Problem and Proposed Response

Human trafficking still thrives in the crevices of poverty, hunger, and massive joblessness (Text A: 2).

Within the church’s representation of the sex industry, poverty is identified as a social condition which presupposes illegal recruitment and trafficking. The church draws a correlation between impoverishment and the sex industry, indicating partial recognition of the consequences brought on by women’s poor socioeconomic conditions. Yet, institutional responsibility in solving the structural gender inequalities is absent from the discourse. After labeling these social conditions faced by women, attention shifts away from a structural critique. The responsibility for trafficking is placed on two tangible actors: those who prey on vulnerable women and women who “fall victim” to trafficking out of temptation.

According to the church’s construction, the root of human trafficking is the traffickers themselves. Consequentially, the response to human trafficking is focused on educating vulnerable individuals and preventing traffickers from preying on impoverished women. For example, CBCP in response to sex industry explains: “The church and the government<sup>6</sup> must both increase their efforts in educating our people about the temptation for easy money” (Text

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<sup>6</sup> The church and government are referenced together often in the samples examined, which represents the intertwining of church and state in Philippine politics.

B: 3). The proposed response of informational campaigns does little to resolve the unequal social conditions which influence the existence of FSWs. This lapse in logic represents the church's alignment with dominant narrative of human trafficking, in which blame is placed on 'traffickers,' a socially constructed enemy. Recognizing an alternative narrative of the sex industry, one which acknowledges the agency of sex workers, would necessitate the institutional responsibility in mending the structural inequalities which perpetuate the phenomena. Therefore, the church reproduces the unequal social conditions felt by the majority of women in the Philippines by narrowly constructing culpability for the phenomenon of human trafficking.

### Fluidity of Agency

Thus far, FSWs have been constructed as victims of human trafficking. Agency, therefore, is unrecognized in sexual labor. However, specifically within the church's suggestions on prevention, the agency of FSWs becomes muddy and takes on a fluid understanding. This is somewhat unexpected; in assigning blame, agency is also assigned which weakens the church's construction of FSWs as voiceless victims.

As examined, blame is directly placed on recruiters and traffickers; in effect, heightened police intervention is justified as the proper method of response. However, the church also indirectly attributes fault to women who choose to enter the informal industry, suggesting that women who make this choice are responsible for falling into monetary temptation. Blame is indirectly attributed to FSWs in the church's proposed prevention initiatives. Informational campaigns on the criminality of human trafficking and the respect for human rights are suggested to protect women from the 'risk of temptation' which is presented by the sex industry and other unofficial labor positions. Ultimately, this constructs the inability of women to avoid temptation and their culpability in entering the industry. It also suggests that by informing at-risk populations of women, entrance into the industry will effectively be thwarted. However, this prevention method ignores the socioeconomic issues which perpetuate the sex industry; and again, assumes it is women who are responsible for falling into the temptation of conniving traffickers. Logically, therefore, women must be the ones who are informed

about the threat of temptation. In assigning blame for human trafficking, the institutional church shifts attention towards interventions which respond directly to the constructed 'culprits:' illegal traffickers and women duped by temptation.

### Constructing an Enemy from Abroad

Another discursive theme present in the research is the personification of a tangible enemy as a rhetorical strategy in the church's battle against trafficking. Through this process, 'traffickers' are conceptualized as a tangible enemy personified through church discourse: "Traffickers are always moving, on the go in order to search for prey or to get away from government authorities" (Text B: 5). In referring to the enemy's actions of preying and evading, the vague conception of 'traffickers' is materialized and specified. This conceptualization of enemy is furthered as traffickers are presented as deceptive sources of temptation. According to church discourse, the enemies of human trafficking are claimed to 'make use of fraud, deception, and dangling of money or gifts' as their *modus operandi*.

The institutional church's discursive construction of enemy involves the understanding of human-trafficking as an issue from abroad. Traffickers are represented as operating largely outside the national border—a trend in the discourse which ignores the local market for sex and provokes nationalist sentiments of border control. Within Text A, the church refers to past instances of cross-border trafficking in Syria and Malaysia (2). By focusing discussion on transnational sex labor, local markets within Philippine global cities are excluded from discussion. Citing 'evidence' of sex work as an issue from abroad, the church partakes in the foreignization of the issue in Text B where trafficking victims are discussed in terms of their forced migration: "Once in the foreign country he or she ends being used for illegal activities or worse is forced to prostitution" (4). Here, women are constructed as victims of forced relocation to foreign lands, establishing the issue on the international scale. Consequentially, the discussions of anti-trafficking programs situate themselves around protection from forced migration. Advocation of transnational policing measures ensues within the church's discourse: "to prevent human trafficking is to make our immigration officials at the port and airport terminals to become more strict..." (Text B: 3). By centering sex labor as a transnational

issue, local sex markets within Philippine global cities are excluded from institutional discussion. In result, the sex industry becomes an issue of international relations. This construction has implications, as prevention then becomes a matter of migration and transportation surveillance. National contexts of sex work, and therefore local solutions, fail to make it into deliberation because the church's conceptualization of sex work situates around the internationality of the issue as opposed to its local reality.

### The Violation of Human Rights

The church reproduces humanitarian dialogue which surrounds itself around the protection of individuals' dignity and human rights. In this way, human trafficking challenges the protections set out by Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and therefore must be rejected on the basic grounds of humanitarian law. However, beyond claiming the violation of rights—the church offers weak explanation of *how* women's rights are challenge, suggesting meager critical synthesis in the creation of this argument beyond its alignment with international dialogue. To protect oneself from sexual exploitation, the church claims that women must be 'made aware of their rights' in Text B. However, the rights which are referred to lack specific identification. In a similarly vague manner, the church appeals to individuals' 'basic human right' in Text A:

[PIHMAT] is committed to stand against human trafficking in all its diverse forms and to support victims of human trafficking to reclaim their dignity and to seek justice, affirming the basic human right that every person bears 'to life, liberty and security' and that 'no one shall be held in slavery or servitude (4).

By discussing the violation of human rights, the church constructs human trafficking as an 'utmost crime.' Supporting the church in its fight for human rights is made common sense for its followers when framed in this way.

As mentioned, the specific rights of relevance are presumed by the church. Modern slavery and the threat to human rights are social constructions of insecurity associated with sex work. Within a counternarrative, however, a completely different construction of insecurity could

exist. Let us consider those who utilize sex work as a means of securing livelihood. Within the alternate narrative of sexual laborers' empowerment, one could critique the human rights abuses of the formal labor sector which push women into informal positions. More specifically, alternate narratives might cite the threats to individuals' liberty which occur in official sectors like domestic work and factory work (Acosta & Acosta, 2013; Lu, 2015). This counternarrative exemplifies the subjective construction of human insecurity, highlighting how the mainstream narrative controls the experience of FSWs through the biased interpretation of human rights. Despite the flaws beyond the surface of the argument, claiming the breach in human rights has major repercussions in the form of moral panic and public rejection of sex work.

### Government Representation

There is an overlap between the church and state discourses, which was expected given the influential presence of Catholicism within Philippine politics as explored in the literature. That being said, the government produces a criminalizing framing of the sex industry as it relates to the encompassing crime of human trafficking. Within this framing, the state aligns with church discourse in the way that it establishes a tangible 'enemy' from abroad in its fight against human traffic. The gendered structural inequalities which perpetuate human trafficking are touched upon, acknowledging the role of impoverishment in the perpetuation of sex work. Like the church however, the state treats this condition as static, which becomes clear in its anti-trafficking proposals which lack structural redress. Ironically, the state has a role in maintaining the forces of domesticity felt by Filipinas by failing to address the paths to women's liberation from the socioeconomic margins.

### Lexical Choice

The state's discourse presents lexical choices which indicate, on one hand, the stigmatization of the sex industry and, on the other hand, the progressive commitment to victims of trafficking. Victims are presented as the subject of multiple negative forces: 'exploitation,' 'commodification,' 'violence,' 'dehumanization,' 'degradation,' and 'humiliation' are the most commonly referred to in the text. In using extreme language to refer to sex work, the criminalization of the industry is justified, and the severity of crime is heightened.

In juxtaposition, empowering stylistic choices are employed in the state's humanizing self-presentation and construction of victims. The liberating reference to citizens' 'dignity,' specifically, is a symbolic word choice communicating the state's concern and respect for its people. This language aligns with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in recognition of the 'inherent dignity' of all human beings. The reproduction of vocabulary signifies the Philippines' reliance on international norms of human rights. Lexical styling in this manner is consistent within state and church discourse which both refer to restoring human dignity as a duty pledged in the battle against human trafficking. Invoking the topic of 'dignity' frames the issue as a much more serious affront, one of human rights on the international platform. Furthermore, in the state's reference to victims—words like 'recovery,' 'rehabilitation,' and 'reintegration' evoke the perception that a subject is in need of assistance. Agency shrinks further away, as this tonal choice supports the representation victims' passivity in their conditions.

Sex work is not something that is *done by* a subject, it is a labor form that is *done to* a subject. Framing the sex industry as a condition which someone is subjected to is reinforced by the syntactical choices. Consistently, victims are placed as objects of the sentence. Therefore, their individual actions are discussed in the past-tense as crimes being committed against them. In this way, FSWs become passive objects and their perceived helplessness is constructed.

### The Violation of Human Rights

Both texts within the state's subsample converge in their presentation of human trafficking (including every act within the sex industry, by definition) as a human rights violation. By challenging the sanctity of human rights, an act's rejection via criminalization is necessitated. Therefore, the constructed criminality of sex work catalyzes the implementation of strict police intervention and legitimizes heightened surveillance in the justice system. Involuntary investigations and humanitarian rescue operations, as mandated by the state in Text C, become practical and legitimized considering their perceived role in upholding human rights.

In addition to necessitating state intervention, this framing of human trafficking constructs a particular version of victimhood. Controlling the understandings of FSWs, this argument

selectively includes and excludes the social conditions which jeopardize human rights. Focus is placed on the exploitive relationship between buyers and FSWs and the resulting degradation of women in the process. In reference to the state's commitment to 'women's rights and gender equality,' the PCW as a branch of the state comments: "Gender equality will remain unattainable as long as men buy, sell and exploit women and children by prostituting them" (Text D: 3). According to this framing, it becomes the buyers' fault for the reproduction of gender inequality experienced by women in the Philippines. However, this claim fails to consider the pre-existing conditions of gender inequality which presuppose women entering the industry. Here, the state produces a narrow understanding of the interaction between sexual labor and human rights abuse. It is only at the point of transaction where FSWs' human rights are abused. Yet, the indignity of the structural inequalities which jeopardize the livelihoods of women and *push* them into informal labor positions are missing from the discourse. Sexual commerce is exploitive, yet women must already be experiencing exploitive conditions (the force of domesticity in the labor market, for example) which cause them to enter the sex industry as a 'sustainable' alternative. In this case, women's pre-existing social inequalities are yet to be considered in the state's understanding to human rights violations. This exclusion from institutional discussion of human rights represents the reproduction of the sex industry's preferred narrative which disregards FSWs' negotiations of exploitation and agency within the sex industry.

### The Demand Side of Sexual Commerce

According to the state's dialogue, the human rights of FSWs are imperiled only by the demand of sexual commerce, not by their pre-existing social conditions which make them susceptible to entering the trade. Therefore, in deliberation of state intervention it is the demand side of sex work that must be addressed. This dominant understanding of the sex industry's demand which conflicts with the rights of women manifests within the state's proposed redress of the issue:

The most common underlying cause that primarily sustains prostitution is 'demand.' It is the customer's demand for sex or sexual exploitation that fuels prostitution; if there were no

customers, users or buyers, or when demand is counteracted, there would be much-decreased supply or the number of victims would reduce (Text D: 1).

This framing legitimizes the government's suggestion on legislation which focuses on curbing the demand of sexual labor. A legislative amendment is advocated to penalize the "real culprits in the sex industry" which is specified as meaning "traffickers, pimps, customers or buyers of sex." Accordingly, this revision of focus within legislation will eventually, "eradicate the problem of prostitution" (Text D: 3).

This discourse directly assigns the responsibility for producing and perpetuating the sex industry to those who demand sex as a commodity. Indirectly, however, this narrative shifts attention away from the systemic inequalities which establish sex work as an empowering form of labor. The failure to recognize the structural forces which increase women's susceptibility to entering the sex industry is a symptom of the failure to recognize FSWs' agency in the first place.

### Prescribing Victimhood

Beyond the function of victimhood within the state's appeal to human rights as discussed above, the government reproduces the understanding of FSWs as individuals in need of savior through their victim-focused public programs. In the creation of sexual humanitarian programs, the label of 'victim' is involuntarily placed upon FSWs. The state orders the placement of trafficked victims under protective custody of the Department of Social Welfare and Development in Text C. Furthermore, the state necessitates the development of ordained counseling programs to help victims "cope with the trauma they have suffered on account of trafficking" (Text C: 30). Custodial detainment and mandated counseling become problematic considering the lack of choice subjects have in their enrolment of these programs.

These programs become a burden, however, when considered in the context of sex workers' agency. FSWs who are victimized by the state, must involuntarily give up their sources of income and custodianship in order to be 'saved' from their voluntary conditions. Trauma is

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assigned, the status of victimhood is prescribed without choice. Vulnerabilities of FSWs, then, are reproduced as the state assumes precedence over bodily integrity. The creation of these humanitarian programs without the acknowledgement of agency within sex industry will continue to reproduce and exacerbate the vulnerabilities of FSWs.

The social understanding of FSWs is thereby monitored by the state. Free will in entering the sex industry is either ignored or denied in its social construction by the government, which is reflected directly within the institution's discourse. Consider Text C which provides a definition for trafficking in persons:

**(a) *Trafficking in Persons* – refers to the recruitment, obtaining, hiring, providing, offering, transportation, transfer, maintaining, harboring, or receipt of persons with or without the victim's consent or knowledge, within or across national borders by means of threat, or use of force, or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of position, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the person, or, the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation which includes at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others, or the engagement of others for the production or distribution, or both, of materials that depict child sexual abuse or exploitation, or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, servitude, or the removal or sale of organs.**

Source: Text C: 3

This definition is of interest specifically as it references consent. The state labels an act as 'trafficking' regardless of whether the laborer has consented or not. Consequentially, there is a broad range of actions which may be considered 'trafficking' by this definition. Within this definition's wide criteria is where sex work becomes synonymous with the high crime of trafficking in persons. However, the encompassing effect of this definition is problematic, because it delegitimizes the realities of FSWs who find socioeconomic empowerment in the sex industry. Labeling the experience of FSWs as trafficked victimhood ignores the complex choice and negotiations which women face in entering the industry.

This prescription of victimhood recreates the oppression of FSWs indirectly; something which becomes clear when considering the consequences of state discourse. Consider the following addition within Text C which insists on the prosecution of trafficking cases:

**(j) *Affidavit of Desistance.* – Cases involving trafficking in persons should not be dismissed based on the Affidavit of Desistance executed by the victims or their parents or legal guardians. Public and private prosecutors are directed to oppose and manifest objections to motions for dismissal. Any attempt to unduly pressure the complainant to execute an Affidavit of Desistance shall be punishable under this Act;**

Source: Text C: 18

Prosecution is inescapable which only becomes problematic when considering its repercussions for FSWs. Forced policing means that a workers' source of labor will inevitably be shut-down and their incomes will cease to exist. This prospect is detrimental, as many FSWs rely on these incomes to support themselves and their families. Furthermore, the prosecution of a business in the sex industry will also indirectly affect the dozens of women who are employed by the same source. Therefore, the compulsory assignment of justice to prescribed victims indirectly reproduces the state's power over FSWs in the form of policing and surveillance of labour.

### Constructing an Enemy from Abroad

State discourse dedicates special attention to 'overseas' and 'transnational cases' of trafficking. Differing from the institutional church which constructs the foreign-ness of trafficking directly, this characteristic is manufactured obliquely within the state's iterations of anti-trafficking intervention. Repatriation is a focal point in state response to trafficking victims, which represents the state's foreign focus in its victim-led response. Meanwhile, points of entry are focused on in the discussion of increased anti-trafficking surveillance which results in the heightened security measures and standardized inspections of the country's ports and harbors. Further discussed by the state, is the development of a new passport system and watch list database for foreign nationals in efforts to curb cases of trafficking.

Indirectly, the legislative focus on surveillance and policing of transport and migration aids in the construction of trafficking as an enemy force from abroad. The foreignized understanding of sex work is reflected in nationalist-underpinned rhetoric which personifies the conceptual forces leading to sex work as a tangible foreign enemy. Although presented subliminally in state discourse, the influence of these sentiments manifests overtly in other institutions—this manifestation was explored earlier within church discourse. The church’s rhetorical framing of traffickers as an enemy from abroad and the state’s subsequent legislative focus on increased border patrol mutually influences and reproduces the transnational understanding of the sex industry within Philippine discourse on human trafficking.

### Tourism and the Sex Industry

Through legislation, the state mandates the tourism industry’s implementation of anti-trafficking initiatives. But within its discourse, the tourism industry lacks formulation in the state’s construction of the sex industry. Within Text C, the state refers to ‘tourism enterprises as sites of human trafficking’ and ‘sex tourism packages,’ suggesting the role which the local tourism industry serves as a source of the Philippine sex industry is seemingly realized by the state. However, this correlation, which is supported and discussed in the literature, goes unreferenced within the institution’s discursive construction of human trafficking’s perpetrators. The local demand of sexual labor is excluded from discussion, which dispels the need for state intervention in local contexts. Instead, responsibility falls on private businesses of the tourism industry to enact anti-trafficking schemes of the state within local formats. The tourism industry is regarded as a secondary actor in the state’s construction of the sex industry. Considering the role of global spaces in perpetuating sex work, which is explored in the literature, the tourism industry as a globalizing force is warranted a stronger focus in the Philippine state’s discourse on human trafficking. Without its adequate realization as something crucial in the perpetuation of sexual commerce, tourism will continue to provoke a demand for sexual labor within national borders.

## The (Neoliberal) Development Community's Representation

Given the Philippines' neoliberal commitments in its development plan, and the contentious role of neoliberal schemes in the perpetuation of the sex industry, I was especially interested in how sex work is represented by the nation's development community. Therefore, I chose cases in which the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the Department of Tourism (DOT) address the sex industry. Within Philippine development discourse, the sex industry is constructed as an issue which will resolve in the processes of modernization—especially in the focused development of security and gender sectors. The discourse aligns in some ways with state and church anti-trafficking representations, and in other ways the development community uniquely contributes to the national discourse.

### Lexical Style

'Human trafficking' is employed to refer to sex industry at large. Differing from the last two sample sets, however, neoliberal development discourse seems to avoid direct use of the phrases 'female sex worker,' 'prostitution,' or 'sexual labor.' The development community's avoidance of this terminology is suggested by the lack of presence of these terms in the texts and the lexical preference of 'trafficking in humans' to refer to any topic within the sex industry.

The development community discusses human trafficking solely within one chapter of the Philippine Development Plan, *Ensuring Security, Public Order, and Safety*. The issue lacks significant reference elsewhere in the document, suggesting its low pertinence within the developmental agenda. Nonetheless, placing the only discussion of human trafficking within this chapter facilitates the frame of criminality in understanding sex work. What follows, given the chapter's concern with insecurity, is indicative wording like 'criminality,' 'illegal recruitment,' 'terrorism,' 'corruption.' The sex industry, placed within the illicit connotations of high crimes, is itself framed as an extreme crime. Priming the audience with the frame of unlawfulness, the reader will construct sex labor as an equally threatening crime through its cognitive association to human trafficking—the process Van Dijk terms 'social cognition' (1993). Countering the constructed severity of the crime, action words like 'fight,' 'combat'

and ‘counter’ are used to describe the anti-trafficking actions of the neoliberal plan. In a connotative way, these words are indicative of violence—one does not fight nor combat something without violence involved. Therefore, the severity of the crime is increased in its discursive construction, as understandings of its violent threat are reproduced lexically.

Differing from other sources of institutional discourse, the development community utilizes reducing and euphemizing terminology to refer to FSWs. Instead of directly referencing these laborers, they are grouped into the myriad of unregulated labor sectors. ‘Workers in the informal sector’ (Text E, Chapter 11) is used as a problematically broad term to identify laborers with ‘inherent vulnerability.’ As to what these vulnerabilities are, is unspecified. Sex workers, domestic workers, home-based industry workers, street vendors, and many other informal laborers lack direct mention in the construction of vulnerable populations. Instead, they are vaguely categorized as the ‘informal sector.’ The lack of specificity in the terminology suggests the reduction of laborers’ experiences and their exclusion from the development community’s focus.

### Interaction with International Norms

Philippine development discourse reproduces the international community’s normalized construction of sex work. This is unsurprising, as both texts within the subsample directly reference the development community’s coordination with ASEAN, INTERPOL, and other international humanitarian organizations. But the development community does more than acknowledge these standards; seemingly, much of the rhetoric on anti-trafficking is actively shaped by international norms. Two things are being communicated throughout the discourse: the nation’s commitment to anti-trafficking initiatives as set by the international community and the nation’s performative presentation of success in implementing these initiatives.

Let us investigate the development discourse in Text E, starting with the headline: ‘victims of trafficking were effectively assisted, but preventive measures need to be strengthened’ (Chapter 18). In this section headline, NEDA is mediating the perception of its success in curbing the sex industry. It validates its claim of achievement through statistics of rescue operations and prosecution of traffickers.

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The government's commitment to protect its people against trafficking led to the conviction of 248 traffickers and secured justice for 645 survivors from 2011 to 2016. There are already 24 task forces operating in different parts of the country, with a total of 7,185 trafficking victims rescued or repatriated and evacuated by foreign service posts abroad (Text E, Chapter 18: 273).

Aside from numbers, this section offers little in terms of the preventive measures which are to be strengthened nor a succinct plan to achieve this goal. The focus on statistics within its discourse hints at the neoliberal community's belief of heightened policing and prosecution as the most effective anti-trafficking intervention. What is missing from the development discourse, however, is the consideration of alternate modes of intervention which may more effectively curb cases of human trafficking.

The development community recognizes the need to 'strengthen preventive measures' of human trafficking in Chapter 18, but it fails to expound on this need. The lack of representation of human trafficking in terms of its prevention suggests the institution's performative compliance with international standards without commitments to its implementation. The mediation of success within public opinion formation returns in Text F, as the development community claims its positive influence in the international anti-trafficking movement:

As the lead country coordinator for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Gender and Development (ASEAN GAD) in tourism, the Department of Tourism (DOT) conducted a forum on the 18-day campaign to end violence against women and children (VAWC) as a national agenda in strengthening GAD not only in the industry but also in the various sectors in the Philippines (Text F).

The statement starts with contextualization, reminding readers of development community's role as leader of ASEAN's Gender and Development in tourism. What follows, is a brief of the community's initiatives promoting gender development. Presenting the information in this way suggests that the Philippine campaign should be a role model for other members of ASEAN. Consequentially, in its international commitments and authority as a transnational

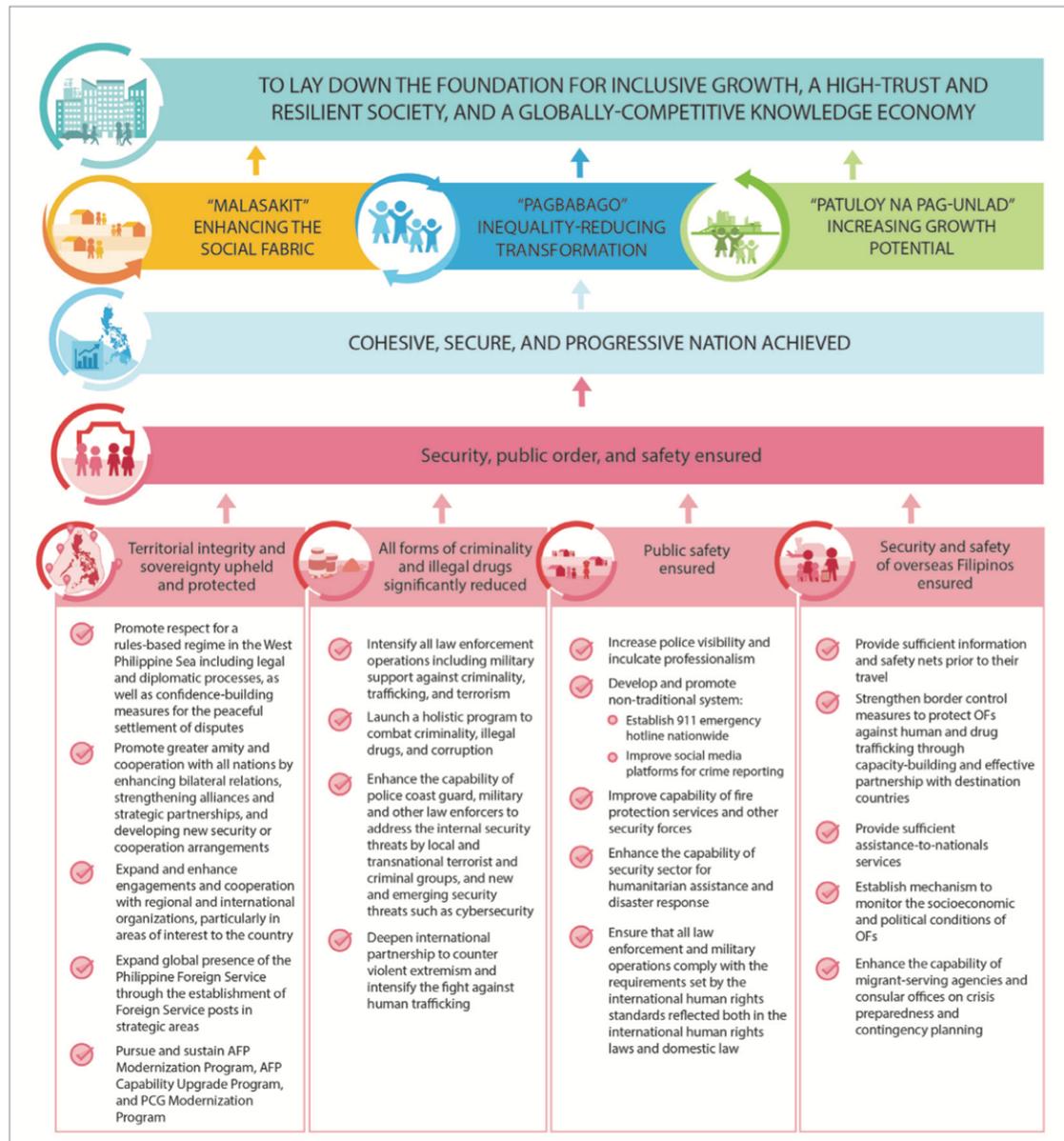
leader of anti-trafficking, the Philippine development community reproduces and normalizes the mainstream construction of human trafficking.

The ethos of quantitative evidence sparks positive public opinion on the development community's perceived efficacy in responding to the issue of human trafficking. Furthermore, the notion of transnational accomplishment in the state's fight against trafficking makes the acceptance of the developmental anti-trafficking programs common-sense. However, the development community's discourse ostensibly serves more purpose in representing the nation's compliance with international standards and transnational success of its anti-trafficking initiatives than it does in deliberating the issue of human trafficking.

### Flow of Logic for Gender Development

In Text E, the development community presents a strategic framework for achieving 'inequality-reducing transformation' and 'inclusive growth' (see Figure 18.1). This framework is of interest in the investigation of power reproduction because of its flow of developmental logic. Accordingly, emphasis is placed on the securitization and policing of crime as a presupposition to inclusion and gender equality. This flow of logic is challenged when investigated within the context of gendered social realities in the Philippines—especially those which perpetuate specific threats to the public order: human trafficking, prostitution, etc.

Figure 18.1 Strategic Framework to Ensure Security, Public Order, and Safety, 2017 – 2022



According to the development community’s construction, it is the issue of human trafficking which stands in the way of gender equality. The direction of this logic, however, becomes faulted in the face of counternarratives of human trafficking which recenter the discussion on the sex industry and the systemic inequalities which render sex work a sustainable labor alternative for women. According to this frame of understanding, the nation’s thriving sex industry can be viewed as a symptom of structural gender inequality. Put in relation to existing theory, the increased supply of sexual demand is indicative of ‘the force of

domesticity' (Parreñas, 2008). Nonetheless, the mainstream narrative of human trafficking excludes the counternarrative of FSWs agency from its discussion. The effects of this restricted narrative manifests within the development community's public securitization strategy which justifies gender equality as the end goal of anti-trafficking intervention.

If the gendered realities of women were to be adequately recognized by the development community, then the current strategic framework would be realized as incapable of their empowerment. Until sex work is recategorized as a symptom of structural inequality within development discourse, the Philippines will continue to reproduce the social conditions which it aims to resolve through development strategy.

### Development Community's Understanding of Vulnerable Populations

The development community lacks consideration of FSWs as a socially and economically vulnerable population, and therefore fails to deliberate the redress of their conditions in its construction of vulnerable populations (Text E, Chapter 11). Despite the institutional acknowledgment of FSWs as victims of systemic inequality (explored earlier within state and church discourse), the structural vulnerabilities of FSWs are absent from development discussions. Surprisingly, also lacking mention despite other institutions' focus on the issue, is impoverished women's vulnerability to entering the sex industry.

The failure to include FSWs as a vulnerable population suggests a gap within national discourse regarding the sex industry. The development community recognizes the physical vulnerability of the population (Text E, Chapter 18)—however, when proposing paths of socioeconomic empowerment for at-risk populations, the vulnerabilities of FSWs go unrealized. This discursive trend reflects the development community's understanding of FSWs as solely victims of sexual exploitation. Their structural vulnerabilities are not considered because it would require the considerations of agency in obtaining monetary gain for the sale of sex.

Going back to the discourse of Philippine state and church which point to structural inequalities which exacerbate women's vulnerabilities (and therefore raising their risk of

exposure to the sex industry), one could expect the development community to respond with human capital investments targeted at equal and sustainable employment options in the formal sector. Despite what may be predicted, the institution lacks any formulation of gender inequality within the labor market (see: Text E, Chapter 10). Similarly, there is a disconnect in institutional discourse between the development community vs. state and church in reference to migration. The state and church have theorized the connection between unequal job opportunity and female migration into the global sex industry. In contrast, neoliberal development schemes critique the small job market for influencing migration, but its correlation with the sex industry goes unmentioned (Text E: 146).

Within the development discourse of the Philippines, FSWs are disregarded as a structurally vulnerable population. The developmental discussion of insecurity is limited to sex workers' physical safety. In this sense, the institution splits from the narratives of sex workers as represented by the church and state of the Philippines. The latter institutions construct FSWs as a socially vulnerable population, the development community lacks this population's inclusion in their dialogue on insecurity. Unlabeled as a focus population by the development community, FSWs are excluded from the institution's investments in human capital which support individuals' securitization beyond physical necessities. The structural inequalities which perpetuate the sex industry will go unresolved unless FSWs' socioeconomic vulnerabilities are adequately recognized and responded to by the development community.

### Tourism and the Sex Industry

As expected, the Department of Tourism (DOT), as a neoliberal actor in the development community, carefully mediates its representation of the sex industry, especially as the issue relates to the tourism sector. The correlation between sex tourism and human trafficking is indirectly drawn within development discourse and can be inferred within its dialogue. For example, the DOT states its commitments to a 'safe and progressive' tourism industry in the contemporary context of female exploitation:

As we celebrate the world renowned hospitality of the Filipino and the characteristic readiness of our people to please at all cost, it is also incumbent upon us to ensure that we

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give equal protection to the most vulnerable members of our society. Like how we value and protect our natural attractions and safeguard our diverse cultures, it is also our responsibility that our people, particularly our women and children, are free from harm, abuse, much more from any sexual exploitation and human trafficking (Text G).

The DOT's inclusion of anti-trafficking in its discourse suggests the risk of said phenomena within the tourism sector. Therefore, the relationship between tourism and the sex industry is discretely constructed through the DOT's anti- 'violence against women' campaigns. However, the presence of sex work within the tourism industry fails to be overtly mentioned within the DOT's discourse. This goes against what was expected, given the overt focus on the tourism sector as a thriving site of sexual labor within state discourse, as discussed earlier (see: Text C).

Beyond the commitment to protecting women and children within the tourism industry, not much is offered in terms of *how* this will be achieved. The focus on informational campaigns, overlapping with suggestions from the institutional church, is echoed in development discourse:

One way to be able to end violence against women, to stop any and all forms of exploitation, discrimination, and gender-based crimes in society, is to empower and educate the women of society (Text F).

Similar to its effect as examined earlier, this rhetoric shifts attention away from the structural issues which need redress to effectively curb the sex industry. Additionally, the proposal for informational campaigns places blame on individuals who enter the industry for its monetary benefits. In turn, the construction of FSWs' victimhood is complicated by discourse which conveniently represents its fluidity. It becomes women's responsibility in avoiding exploitive experiences. The institutions, partially offload their responsibility in protecting FSWs' by providing them education and information—rendering them capable in 'protecting' themselves with knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, I investigate the Philippine social understanding of sex work, as it is discursively shaped by the state, church, and development community. Through my implementation of CDA I outline how ‘human trafficking’ is a broadly constructed category which encompasses prostitution, pornography, and other acts of sexual commerce. The breadth of human trafficking’s conceptual structure, both influential to and influenced by the nation’s discourse, is discussed according to its ramifications. Sex work, argumentatively, becomes incompatible with human agency, as the industry’s conceptual placement within the context of human trafficking’s criminality defocuses and excludes considerations of FSWs’ free-will. In this instance, the theoretical linkage between crime and sexual labor results in the stigmatization and criminalization of the sex industry.

Institutional discussion produces an incomplete understanding of human trafficking as a phenomenon due to the missing considerations of FSWs’ agency. The reproduction of this limited construction establishes a ‘preferred narrative’ of sex work as it relates to human trafficking. The preferred narrative of sex work is echoed throughout the sample set—directly by the state and church, and indirectly by the development community. The church constructs human trafficking as a moral threat to Philippine society—a construction which also represents FSWs in rigid victimhood. Representations from the church overlap with the state’s discourse, as the state similarly reproduces the preferred narrative of sex work. Importantly, the institution solidifies the stigma of Philippine sex workers through the sex industry’s criminalization in anti-trafficking legislation. The state and church mutually interact with one another within their discourse, aiding each other in the moral and criminal rejection of sex work and the reduction of FSWs to victimhood. The preferred narrative of sex work manifests indirectly within development community’s discourse with the lack of developmental attention on intranational sex markets. The development community departs from representations of victimhood as presented by the church and state; in this way, it constructs FSWs as victims of bodily exploitation and ignores their social and economic vulnerabilities in representations of victimhood. The ignorance to gendered structural inequalities—and the inability to recognize the risk it poses of women’s entrance into informal labor positions—

ensures the development community's failure to contextualize sex workers as a systemically vulnerable population. Accordingly, the development community focuses protection and prevention methods on physical insecurity and forced migration as opposed to tackling the systemic faults which perpetuate the sex industry.

Within the research, an international framing of human trafficking emerged. Ostensibly, the institutions collectively partake in the 'foreignization' of the issue within their discourses, construing sex work as a crime which transcends national borders but nonetheless poses a threat to local populations of women. According to this construction, heightened policing, especially at points of entry, becomes the normalized response to human trafficking. In discussion of my findings however, I critique the lack of interventions which consider local contexts of sex work in the Philippines. In effect, institutional reflections on the nation's sex industry fail to recognize the phenomenon's relation to structural inequalities—a realization which would likely appear if deliberation adequately considered FSWs' local realities.

Through the institutions' intertextual construction, FSWs are conceptually stripped of agency and prescribed victimhood which consequentially exacerbates their vulnerability to exploitation and socioeconomic burden. The (re)production of this representation is an example of institutional expression of political power through text. This expression is by virtue of the church, state, and development community's special access to political deliberation, and hence the formulation of legislation regarding FSWs. Indirectly, this formulation influences the social understandings presented by the media and the public. Therefore, within the discourse under investigation, one witnesses the enactment of gender inequality at the highest possible level.

To examine i) the enactment of political power and dominance over FSWs and ii) the role of this discourse in the reproduction of this dominance, I systematically discuss the major discursive elements within Philippine institutional dialogue on human trafficking. I have examined the *direct* production of dominance by focusing on the normalizing representations of FSWs within the texts. I then explore the *indirect* production of power by discussing these discursive units beyond their text, as they relate to the social process. I highlight the consequences of these representations in excluding the realities of FSWs and impeding their

capabilities of human development. The current institutional dialogue frames sexual labor as a matter of public insecurity. I argue, given the contexts of FSWs in the Philippines, how sex work *ought* to be refocused as a labor trend influenced by the process of neoliberal globalization and the presence of gendered structural inequalities. Given this recontextualization, national development initiatives as a form of anti-trafficking intervention would be legitimized within institutional discussion. The implementation of mainstream anti-trafficking interventions (heightened policing and prosecution) merely respond to the surface symptoms of a larger issue: the gendered structural inequalities in the Philippines. On these conditions, I critique the nation's discourse on human trafficking and the subsequent representation of sex workers. Regardless of police intervention, the supply and demand of the sex industry will continue to thrive without the refocus in discourse on the structural roots which influence human trafficking as a phenomenon.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Sample set matrix

|               |   |                                  |
|---------------|---|----------------------------------|
| <b>Text A</b> | Philippine Interfaith Movement Against Human Trafficking. (2021, July 30) <i>Statement in Observance of World Day Against Trafficking 2021: Let the victims’ voices lead the way</i> [Press Release] <a href="https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/let-victims-voices-lead-the-way/">https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/let-victims-voices-lead-the-way/</a> .                            | Institutional Church Discourse   |
| <b>Text B</b> | Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines. (2018, June 20) <i>Human Trafficking is Modern-day Slavery</i> [Pastoral Reflection] <a href="https://cbcponline.net/human-trafficking-is-modern-day-slavery/">https://cbcponline.net/human-trafficking-is-modern-day-slavery/</a> .   |                                  |
| <b>Text C</b> | Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, Republic Act No. 11862 (2022, June 23). <a href="https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2022/06/02/republic-act-no-11862/">https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2022/06/02/republic-act-no-11862/</a> .   | State Discourse                  |
| <b>Text D</b> | Philippine Commission on Women. (2019) <i>Enacting the Anti-Prostitution Law: Amending Articles 202 and 341 of the Revised Penal Code</i> (Policy Brief No. 9). <a href="https://pcw.gov.ph/assets/files/2019/07/PCW-WPLA-Policy-Brief-9-Anti-Prostitution.pdf?x15706">https://pcw.gov.ph/assets/files/2019/07/PCW-WPLA-Policy-Brief-9-Anti-Prostitution.pdf?x15706</a> . |                                  |
| <b>Text E</b> | National Economic and Development Authority. (2017) <i>Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022</i> . Pasig City, Philippines. <a href="https://pdp.neda.gov.ph/devt-plans/">https://pdp.neda.gov.ph/devt-plans/</a> .   | Neoliberal Development Discourse |
| <b>Text F</b> | The Philippine Department of Tourism (2022). <i>On the DOT: Official Newsletter</i> , Vol. 5, Issue No. 11: 15  |                                  |
| <b>Text G</b> | The Philippine Department of Tourism (2019, August 13). <i>DOT launches TOURISM WoRCS to combat children, women’s abuse</i> [Press Release]. <a href="http://www.tourism.gov.ph/news_features/worcs.aspx">http://www.tourism.gov.ph/news_features/worcs.aspx</a> .  |                                  |

APPENDIX B – CDA hand coded example

# Let the victims' voices lead the way



STATEMENT IN OBSERVANCE OF  
**WORLD DAY AGAINST TRAFFICKING 2021**  
July 30, 2021

Text —  
Discourse —  
Social —

*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; His understanding has no limit. The Lord sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground. Ps. 147:3-6 NIV*

PIMAHT joins the global community in observing World Day Against Trafficking today, July 30. We especially affirm this year's theme, 'Victims' Voices Lead the Way,' upholding the dignity, desires and dreams of our brothers and sisters who have fallen victim to human trafficking. Truly, they should be included, heard, and involved as we seek to address this social problem.

Victims' voices are being heard

Even with the current status of the Philippines as a Tier 1 rank by the US Department of State TIP REPORT, human trafficking still thrives in the

<https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/let-victims-voices-lead-the-way/>

Reliance on international norms of TIP

*Recognition of social causes*

*trafficking happens abroad*

crevices of poverty, hunger, and massive joblessness. This is even aggravated as majority of the population are poor families struggling to survive from the economic backlash of the pandemic. Early this year, we have witnessed the exposition of well-coordinated trafficking of women in Syria, although reports were already made that all the victims were already repatriated back home. What was alarming was it involved officials in the government bureaucracy that made it a large-scale scheme.

*IP is something that is done to someone*

*Importance of family within Filipino culture*

Since the pandemic, thousands have been repatriated or have returned back to the country, facing the cyclical problem of unemployment, hunger and poverty, the same reasons why they had to leave our country. They join the many other Filipinos who are grappling against the economic impact of the prolonged lockdown in the country, unable to support their families who are relying on them. In a study released by IOM Philippines in May 2021, 83% of those who were able to return home remain unemployed. These are the Filipinos who became victims of human trafficking. At the same time, the Philippines recorded a significant increase of 264% cases of online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) according to the Department of Justice, Office of Cybercrime (DOJ-OOC).

*Protection of vulnerable*

This affirmed our concern that when a humanitarian crisis breaks out under extreme conditions of poverty, social problems like OSEC thrive. Children become easy prey in times when families are barely surviving and grappling with hunger. Thus, government agencies, churches, faith communities and organizations must work hand in hand to support and protect vulnerable groups like children and make communities safer for them especially at this time of pandemic.

PIMAHT, with its mission to see Filipino communities of faith working together to eradicate human trafficking in the Philippines, is continuously tapping other organizations for partnerships in strengthening awareness and

prevention campaigns against human trafficking and providing assistance to those at-risk, victims and survivors.

The organization, spearheaded by its three executive members: Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), and Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) together with member organizations, Philippine Children's Ministries Network (PCMN), International Justice Mission (IJM) Philippines, and Talitha Kum Philippines (TKP), vow to prevent and serve as a shield against human trafficking through awareness campaigns, consultations, and provision of social services to assist and bring justice to survivors. In addition, the organization and its partner churches always open their doors to provide a safe space and sanctuary, help the survivors restore their life through psychological and financial support, and accompany them to a journey of healing caused by the nightmares of human trafficking.

churches  
offer  
supportive  
alternative  
to sex  
industry

As PIMAHT, we call on the faith community to keep extending mercy, compassion, and solidarity to the victims of human trafficking. Let us offer our spaces and resources for their needs. Let's continue accompanying them in their quest for justice and accountability. As the faith community has a strong presence in the local communities, we encourage our churches to also strengthen the information drives to increase the awareness of sectors of the community as a pivot on preventing human trafficking.

liberating  
parenting  
within  
anti-family  
discourse

We call on our government to intensify its campaign against human trafficking. We especially hope that it will finally address the root causes of trafficking – create life-sustaining jobs at home and extend basic social services to the poor to enable them to better their situations. We also call for the government to justly prosecute its officials involved in these schemes.

call for  
increased  
institutional  
response

recognition  
of  
unemployment  
&  
impoverishment

call for  
increased  
policing

As PIMAHT, we continue to pray and extend our acts of solidarity to those