

Sexual Brokenness in SE Asia – Dan Hitz

Dan Hitz is the Executive Director of Reconciliation Ministries of Michigan, and has been taking short-term missions trips to SE Asia for over ten years. This article is a compilation of observations and experiences during those trips and insights gained from ministry friends. Those who contributed to this article include Frank Worthen, Benji Cruz, Shirley Baskett, Nick Kuiper, Peter Lane, and many others that have contributed through Living Waters Asia.



In looking at sexual brokenness in Southeast Asia it is easy to recognize some common threads that we can also see in the US. There are the familiar stories of boy meets girl... boy wants to marry girl... boy struggles with an addiction to pornography that messes up their relationship... Another familiar story is the lack of parental guidance in the areas of emotional and sexual development. Benji Cruz, Director of Living Waters Philippines¹, points out in his presentation on sexuality among Filipino teens²; the youth of today listen to celebrities through media and the internet because the celebrities don't shy away from the topics that are important to them. Sexuality is huge for teenagers and these people talk about it. Teens want honesty and these people get to the point and say what they think about relationships and sexuality. Cruz goes on to say that "they may be honest and funny and speaking to our children but what they're telling them can lead to destruction". Sound familiar? One need only to reflect on the 2014 Grammy's to realize how deeply this is also entrenched into American culture.³

Along with the similarities, there are also deeper cultural wounds and nuances that are far more common to SE Asia than in the States. Although men and women throughout the world have struggled to grow up in poor families where father and mother were either absent or not involved in their lives, poverty and fatherlessness is even more prevalent in SE Asia than it is in the US. There exists a matriarchal society where mothers themselves may be deeply wounded and/or absent like the father. This leaves the youth vulnerable to feelings of abandonment and abuse. It inflicts heavy damage to their souls.

Poverty is a harsh reality for many underdeveloped countries. Nick Kuiper⁴ of Exodus Asia Pacific⁵ who ministers frequently in Davao, Philippines, estimates that 40% of the population lives in extreme poverty with little food, 40% may have a small amount of resources yet still struggle, and 20% are professionals who are actually doing okay. For this reason many Asian parents leave their families to find employment in another city or country to provide for their kids. Although some of the children left behind are cared for by grandparents, it is common to have a young child below the age of ten left to care for the younger siblings.



A 2012 study on overseas Filipino workers estimates that there were over 2.2 million Filipinos working overseas from April to September 2012⁶. The study reports an almost even proportion of male to female workers when all age ranges are considered (51.7% male), but shows that females significantly outnumber males in the younger age ranges. This means that younger children are left without the influence of their mothers early in life, and then are left without their fathers later on. Even in the families where one parent remains present, there are heavy

effects on the family from the parent working away from the hometown. During one of my layovers in SE Asia, I talked to a Filipino man who was traveling to the States for work. He shared some of his challenges as a husband and father working overseas and only seeing his family for a short time. He was frustrated that his wife had to lead the family while he was gone, and that she has a difficult time allowing him to lead the family during his short stays back home. I could sense the conflict in his heart as he recounted some of the heavy challenges that his family was facing while he was away. Nevertheless, he was drawn by the financial need to gain employment wherever he could find it.

Many in SE Asia turn to prostitution as a means to earn a living. It can be seen as respectable for young women to enter into prostitution to support the rest of the family. Sometimes young girls are sold into prostitution by their parents who see a way to make money. Shirley Baskett⁷ of Exodus Asia Pacific explains that it is a sign of great wounding and hardness when parents can overlook the welfare of their own children in these situations. Unfortunately the families make that decision because they are desperate to stay alive. I remember reading an article years ago that told of a ministry in Thailand that rescued girls from their sex traffickers, and realized that they could not release the girls back to their parents lest the parents sell the girls right back to the traffickers. Whether prostitution was entered into willingly or unwillingly, it inflicts a heavy price on the human soul.

Less obvious than prostitution are the Westerners who are sought by Asian males and females because of the perception of financial stability. Wealthy Westerners often take advantage of the vulnerability of those seeking father figures and financial security. Desperate Asian men and women take advantage of the Westerners trying to find a young man or woman to fill the void in their own heart. Both use the other. Both remain empty.

In addition to the wounds inflicted by parents working away from home, many in SE Asia suffer from wounds inflicted by the absence of commitment to the family unit itself. In some countries, it is socially acceptable for a married man to visit a prostitute as long as it is kept quiet. Frank Worthen⁸, founder of Bagong Pagasa⁹ in the Philippines, points out that fathers may have three or four families. They get married and overwhelmed with the children of that marriage, and then move on to start another family. This leaves sons and daughters in Thailand and the Philippines to wrestle with the reality that their fathers liked their other family better than them. Children learn the devaluation of family relationships through the poor role models of their parents and popular culture. Benji Cruz cites a 2009 study by de Irala, et. Al. of BioMed Central¹⁰ indicating that over half of Filipino teens believe that it is acceptable to visit a prostitute or commit adultery.



Perhaps another result of the matriarchal society is the devaluation of masculinity and the rise of transgender issues. It is very common to see “ladyboys” working in department stores, hotels, and many other venues in the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. Ladyboys go beyond transvestites who are men wearing women’s attire for sexual and emotional arousal, and strive to adopt feminine behavior and appearance. Many receive hormonal injections or undergo surgical procedures to enhance their feminine appearance. Gender reassignment surgery, a step further than the ladyboy, is readily available in Thailand and much less expensive than in the West. SE Asian society in general seems to be much more accepting of transgender issues than the US.



As in the United States, childhood sexual abuse is a common problem in SE Asia. Father wounds are a significant issue that make both males and females vulnerable to a pre-abuse set up. Whether the parents are absent due to employment, abandonment, or any other reason; the children suffer from the effects of a mother and father wound. Child abuse is common among vulnerable boys and girls who are desperate for the attention of a father figure and in deep financial need. Absent parents allow the children to be placed with relatives who may not care for the children as dearly as their own parents. The financial need leaves tender hearts open to the gifts the predators have to offer during the grooming process.

Peter Lane¹¹ of On Eagles Wings to Asia¹² has spent over ten years researching Asian sexuality in seven different countries and notes that most Christian churches and parents are silent when it comes to discussing sexuality with their children. Of the 10,000 people he has spoken to, only 4% received sex education. This often leaves them with the idea that sexuality in general is sinful and with no place to go when they struggle. He writes that the average Asian Christian waits five years before seeking help for a sexual problem, that approximately half don't find the level of care they need, and that it took an average of four years before most realized any significant change. The fields are indeed ripe for the harvest, but the laborers are few (Matthew 9:37).

In light of all the sexual and relational brokenness in SE Asia and the depth of the father wounds, one of the most important steps in recovery is connecting those who are broken to the Father heart of God. Hope comes alive as they see their value and worth in the heart of their Heavenly Father. One of my favorite Scriptures is Psalm 27:10 which reads, "When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the Lord will take care of me" [NKJV]. As we allow the Father to fill up the voids in our hearts we realize that we have a Heavenly Father who truly does care for us and will not reject us, no matter how far we have fallen. We can experience the kindness of God that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4) and cleanses us from our sin. We can experience healing for our broken hearts and restoration of the years that were destroyed by the enemy and our own sinful choices.



Through the years that I have been involved with Living Waters¹³ trainings and retreats in SE Asia¹⁴, some of the most powerful ministry sessions have been on the healing of the mother and father wound. Other powerful ministry times include healing for the true masculine and the true feminine. Hearts become more open to the love of God as the years of pain from abandonment and abuse are cleansed by the Holy Spirit. Men and women are strengthened as they learn to accept the good of their God-given gender and stand as the men and women of God they were created to be. They become empowered to accept the other gender as a good and holy gift. Thick emotional walls of detachment and self-protection begin to melt away as they allow the Holy Spirit to be their healer and protector.

Such acceptance of the father heart of God allows us all to become more open to the forgiveness of God and His call to lay down our idols of illicit sexuality, and learn to walk in sexual purity. It helps us to open the vaults in our hearts where years of pain from sexual abuse, physical abuse, and rejection have been suppressed. Cleansing and restoration comes as we offer our pain up to a loving Savior who gladly receives our wounds as His own and pours out His comfort and healing on us. In this way the differences in cultural wounds meets the consistency of the Father's love for all of us, no matter what nation, tribe, and tongue is ours. We see the Father's provision for healing and deliverance for all who call out to Him.



The enemy of our souls will continue to use the trials, challenges, and temptations of this life to afflict all of us and try to capture us with sexual and relational sin. Fortunately we have hope and healing through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ and the power of His love. The Lord has raised up an army of wounded healers who are equipped to comfort others with the same comfort with which He has comforted them (1 Corinthians 2:4). Jesus Christ has the power to heal the brokenhearted and set the captive free. It is for that reason that we must bring the message of hope and healing in Christ to the far corners of this world.

References and Footnotes

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- ⁴ Kuiper, Nick. Exodus Asia Pacific. <http://www.exodusglobalalliance.org/eastasiap1040.php>
- ⁵ Exodus Asia Pacific and Exodus Global Alliance are separate organizations from Exodus International North American. EAP and EGA continue to uphold Biblical views of homosexuality and transformation through the grace and power of Jesus Christ.
- ⁶ Ericta, Carmelita N. Administrator. (2013) Republic of the Philippines: National Statistics Office. Total number of OFWs is estimated at 2.2 million (Results from the 2012 survey on overseas Filipinos). Retrieved on 1/31/2014 from <http://www.census.gov.ph/content/total-number-ofws-estimated-22-million-results-2012-survey-overseas-filipinos>
- ⁷ Baskett, Shirley. Exodus Global Alliance. <http://www.exodusglobalalliance.org/contactuss226.php>
- ⁸ Worthen, Frank. Frank Worthen is a well-respected pioneer of ex-gay ministry. He is one of the founders of Exodus International North America and the Restored Hope Network in the US and Bagong Pagas in the Philippines. You can watch a video of his testimony at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VX4AvGRmzSU>
- ⁹ Bagong Pagasa. <http://www.bagongpagasa.org/>
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- ¹¹ Lane, Peter. (2013) Personal correspondence concerning his article entitled "Sexual strugglers and the Asian church". Additional articles from Peter Lane are available at <http://www.oneagleswings2asia.com/articlearchives.htm>
- ¹² On Eagles Wings to Asia. <http://www.oneagleswings2asia.com/index.htm>
- ¹³ Information about the Living Waters program is available at http://www.desertstream.org/Groups/1000040091/Desert_Stream_Ministries/Living_Waters/Living_Waters.aspx
- ¹⁴ Information on Living Waters groups in SE Asia is available at http://www.desertstream.org/Groups/1000040458/Desert_Stream_Ministries/Looking_For_Help/International_Groups/International_Groups.aspx
- ¹⁵ Additional information on understanding God the Father's love is available through Robert Hartzell Ministries. <http://www.roberthartzell.com/>