

## Risky sexual behavior practices in the former *Pucuk Jambi* localization and distribution of commercial sex workers (CSWs) in Jambi Province: A qualitative study with snowball approach

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### Abstract

**Background:** Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) represent a significant health concern among Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs). Jambi Provincial Statistics Agency data from 2023 showed 217 STI cases and 825 cumulative AIDS cases, with the majority in Jambi City. **Objective:** To analyze risky sexual behavior practices among CSWs in the former Pucuk Jambi localization and map CSW distribution across Jambi Province. **Methods:** Qualitative research with in-depth interviews of neighborhood heads, pimps, and CSWs in Pucuk Jambi. Snowball sampling was used to trace CSW distribution based on informant referrals. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. **Results:** This study revealed significant changes in the dynamics of prostitution in the former Pucuk Jambi localization. The number of CSWs in Pucuk Jambi has decreased drastically and pimps no longer have active sex workers. Through snowball sampling, most CSWs have migrated outside Jambi Province, although some are still scattered in Muaro Bungo (1 person), Bangko Merangin (1 person), Merlung Tanjabbar (1 person) and Tungkal Tanjabbar (1 person). Low-risk behavior for STI transmission is associated with the informant's retirement from prostitution, citing reasons such as starting a business, marriage, and advancing age. **Conclusion:** The former Pucuk Jambi location no longer functions as a prostitution center, as sex workers have now spread beyond the province.

**Keywords:** Sexually transmitted infections; commercial sex workers; risk behavior; snowball sampling; Jambi

### Cite This Article

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## INTRODUCTION

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are infections transmitted through sexual activity and are among the most common. Many teenagers are unaware that they have an STD, and many commercial sex workers are unaware of STDs, so they lack preventive measures in their relationships. Some STDs can damage the reproductive organs if left untreated. Moreover, some STDs don't cause symptoms such as pain, itching, or discharge, so some people are slow to realize they have an STD. Many people still consider this taboo, making them reluctant to share if they are experiencing problems with their reproductive organs (1). More than 30 different bacteria, viruses, and parasites are transmitted through sexual contact, including vaginal, anal, and oral sex. Some STDs can also be transmitted through genetics, such as from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. There are eight pathogens associated with STDs, including curable and incurable. Curable STIs include syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, and trichomoniasis, while incurable STIs include hepatitis B, herpes simplex virus (HSV), HIV, and human papillomavirus (HPV).

STIs have a significant impact on sexual and reproductive health worldwide. More than 1 million people contract STIs every day. The WHO estimates that there were 374 million new infections in 2020, including chlamydia (129 million), gonorrhea (82 million), syphilis (7.1 million), and trichomoniasis (156 million). More than 490 million people were estimated to be living with genital herpes in 2016, and 300 million women had HPV infection, the leading cause of cervical and anal cancer in men who have sex with men. (2) Prostitution is the practice of selling sexual services by an individual to a sex worker. Providers of these sexual services are generally referred to as prostitutes, prostitutes (FSWs), or commercial sex workers (CSWs). CSWs are generally defined as women who provide sexual services or requests and aim to satisfy clients in exchange for money or goods. In addition to CSWs, other parties involved in prostitution include consumers, pimps, and intermediaries.

A pimp is someone who benefits materially from sexual transactions through their direct involvement, either partially or fully, in organizing, facilitating, and controlling the management of prostitution, including providing a venue for sexual transactions, supervising the process, recruiting, and so on. (3) According to data from the Jambi Province Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023, there were 217 new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and 25 new cases of AIDS, as well as 825 cumulative AIDS cases as of 2022. The majority of these cases occurred in Jambi City, with 199 STD cases out of 217 cases in the province, while AIDS cases accounted for 22 out of 25 cases in the province, resulting in a cumulative total of 730 AIDS cases out of 825 cases in the province. (4)

This is due to the large number of prostitution venues or red-light districts in Jambi City, including in Cempaka Putih Village, Jeluutung District, Jambi City, commonly known as Pucuk. Meanwhile, risky behaviors for STD transmission among commercial sex workers remain very high, given the low level of knowledge among sex workers regarding STD prevention. Therefore, the author wanted to examine the risky behavior of sex workers in Pucuk in terms of the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and their distribution in Jambi City.

## METHODS

### *Study design and setting*

This study uses a qualitative research method.

### ***Population, samples and sampling***

The population in this study was all sex workers in the districts within Jambi Province, while the sample consisted of neighborhood association heads, pimps, and sex workers in Pucuk Jambi as the main respondents and sex workers in the districts within Jambi Province, according to the references provided by the main respondents, until data saturation was achieved. This study uses a snowball sampling approach.

### ***Instruments and criteria***

The qualitative instrument in this study was the researcher themselves as the primary instrument, since the researcher was directly involved in data collection and analysis. Supporting instruments included interview guides and recording devices.

### ***Procedure and data collection***

The research procedure was conducted by approaching potential informants to establish rapport and obtain ethical approval for in-depth interviews. Subsequently, the researcher collected data through in-depth interviews while simultaneously audio-recording the responses provided by informants. Following data collection, the researcher explored the prepared questions in the interview guide. Subsequently, the audio recordings were transcribed into written format for further analysis and presented in the form of result interpretation.

### ***Statistical analysis***

The analytical method employed thematic analysis to identify patterns and main themes. The analysis was conducted manually by creating verbatim transcripts from the interview recordings and developing matrices based on codes and themes.

## **RESULTS**

This study involved 11 informants, consisting of 1 neighborhood head (Ketua RT) in the former Pucuk Jambi red-light district, 5 pimps (germo), and 4 CSWs spread across various districts within Jambi Province. The main informants (the neighborhood head and pimps) referred to 23 CSWs dispersed across various regions, but only 4 CSWs within Jambi Province could be interviewed, considering that the CSWs outside Jambi Province (19 people) were exclusion criteria for the research.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Research Informants

<b>Informant Category</b>	<b>Person</b>	<b>Description</b>
Neighborhood Head (Ketua RT)	1	Pucuk Jambi area
Pimp (Germo)	5	Former Pucuk red-light district
CSW Jambi Province	4	Muara Bungo (1), Bangko Merangin (1), Tungkal Tanjungbar (1), Merlung Tanjungbar (1)
CSW Outside Province (Exclusion)	19	Batam (6), Java (10), Pekanbaru (3)

### **1. Dynamics of change in the former pucuk jambi red-light district**

In-depth interviews with the Neighborhood Head revealed significant changes in the Pucuk Jambi area after the closure of the red-light district:

"It used to be very crowded here, cars filled the street every night with parking. But now it is quiet, the CSWs have all gone. The only ones left are ordinary residents who have small businesses like food stalls or repair shops. At night, it is dark and silent." (RT Informant, 58 years old)

This statement was reinforced by one of the pimps who had operated in Pucuk for a long time:

"Since the raids and the closure of the red-light district in 2018, my girls all ran away. Some went back to their hometowns, some followed other pimps to big cities. Now I no longer have any girls, I just run a small shop to earn a living day-to-day." (Informant G1, 52 years old)

Another pimp added an economic perspective to the change:

"I used to earn 5-7 million a month from my girls' percentages. Now it's zero. That's why I told many CSWs to look for another safer place, where there are no raids. I gave them contact numbers for pimps outside Jambi who are still active." (Informant G2, 47 years old)

The pimp informants provided detailed information on the migration patterns of CSWs from Pucuk Jambi:

"Of my previous 8 girls, 4 went to Batam, 3 to Jakarta, and 1 to Surabaya. They said it is safer there because the places are large, not as easy to be raided as in Jambi. The income is also higher." (Informant G3, 49 years old)

Another pimp informant explained the organized referral network:

"We pimps have a network. If our place is no longer safe, we refer them to friends in other cities. I have contacts for pimps in Batam and Pekanbaru. I helped my 3 girls find a place there; I coordinated with the pimp there, and they took care of the accommodation." (Informant G4, 45 years old)

The distribution of CSWs outside Jambi Province indicates an organized pattern with a solid inter-pimp network:

"CSWs are smart now, they search for information via mobile phones. There is a special WhatsApp group where they ask about places that are safe and have good incomes. That's why many moved to Java and Batam." (Informant G5, 50 years old)

### **2. Distribution of CSWs in Jambi province and risk profile**

Of the 4 CSWs interviewed in Jambi Province, all showed a low risk profile for STI transmission because they had transitioned out of the CSW profession for various reasons. This finding indicates diverse exit patterns from the commercial sex industry.

Informant AM (39 years old), who now lives in Muara Bungo, explained her life journey and demonstrated a low-risk profile:

"I used to work in Pucuk for about seven years, sir, from 2013 to 2020. When the red-light district closed, I returned to my village in Bungo. Now I have a business selling fried foods and young coconut ice in front of my house. The income is enough to support my daily life with my child." (Informant AM, 39 years old)

When asked about her current sex work activities and risky behaviors:

"No more, sir. I haven't done that anymore since 2020. I focus on selling, and my life is more peaceful. My child is grown up, and I'd be embarrassed if he found out about my previous work. Now I live a normal life like other mothers." (Informant AM, 39 years old)

Regarding her current reproductive health condition:

"Thank God, sir, after leaving that job, I went to the doctor for a check-up. The doctor said I was healthy and had no illnesses. I also stopped having sexual activity because I wasn't married. So, the doctor said, the risk was low." (Informant AM, 39 years old)

Informant ST (35 years old) in Bangko Merangin shared a different experience and demonstrated a low-risk profile:

"Thank God, sir, I'm now married to a good man. My husband knows about my past and is accepting of it. I'm now a housewife, taking care of the house and children. I have no thoughts of returning to my previous job." (Informant ST, 35 years old)

Regarding her past at Pucuk and her current situation:

"When I was at Pucuk, I worked for about three years, from 2015 to 2018. The income was good, but the risks were also high. I once had a severe vaginal discharge that required a doctor while I was still working. The doctor said it was a sexually transmitted infection. But after I recovered and got married, I haven't had any more." (Informant ST, 35 years old)

Regarding her current reproductive health condition:

"After getting married in 2021, my husband and I had a reproductive health checkup together, sir. Thank God, all the tests were negative, no STDs. Now I'm faithful to my husband, so the risk of contracting any STDs is low. We also regularly go to the community health center for family planning, so any reproductive health issues can be identified immediately." (Informant ST, 35 years old)

informant (RW 52 years old) in Tungkal described the situation of a sex worker who has completely stopped working in commercial sex:

"I'm old, sir, and I stopped working three years ago. Now I live in a rented house, living off the help of my children and occasionally helping neighbors with laundry or housecleaning. The income from helping neighbors is enough to cover daily expenses." (RW) informant, 52 years old.

Regarding current sexual behavior and risks:

"I'm no longer sexually active, sir. No one is looking for me anymore because I'm old. The last time I worked like that was in 2021, and then I stopped completely. I was too tired and my body wasn't strong enough. Now I live alone, without a partner, so the risk is low." (RW) informant, 52 years old.

Reflections on reproductive health:

"When I was still sexually active, I rarely went for health check-ups, sir. But after I stopped, I took a free check-up from the mobile community health center. Thank God, my HIV test was negative. The doctor said that because I was no longer sexually active, my risk was low. I've also gone through menopause, so I don't have any vaginal discharge or infections anymore." (Informant RW, 52 years old)

Informant DN (33 years old) in Merlung demonstrated a successful economic adaptation pattern:

"Now I have a small salon business, sir, at home. I cut hair, do cream baths, do facials, and do all sorts of things. I have quite a lot of customers because there aren't many salons here. The income from the salon is sufficient, so I don't do the same work as before in Pucuk anymore." (Informant DN, 33 years old)

Reflections on the past and current situation:

"If you think about it, my previous job was very risky. I contracted a sexually transmitted infection while I was working at Pucuk, with a yellow, smelly discharge. I felt embarrassed, but I had to get treatment. The doctor prescribed antibiotics, and thankfully, I recovered. I was traumatized, sir, so after I recovered, I immediately quit and focused on finding another job." (Informant DN, 33 years old)

Regarding my current health and behavior:

"Since opening my salon in 2022, I haven't engaged in commercial sexual activity. I'm also single and don't have a temporary partner, so I haven't had any sexual activity. I regularly have annual reproductive health check-ups at the community health center, and thankfully, I've always been healthy. The doctor said my risk is low because I haven't engaged in risky sexual activity." (Informant DN, 33 years old)

Views on prevention:

"Now I understand better the importance of maintaining reproductive health, sir. My past experience with illness has made me more aware. If I ever get married, I

will definitely be open with my future husband about my past and will have a joint health check-up before we get married." (Informant DN, 33 years old)

Analysis of the four former sex workers in Jambi Province showed consistent low-risk characteristics. All four had completely stopped their sex work activities, with their periods of cessation ranging from 3-5 years. This demonstrates a commitment to leaving the commercial sex industry and transitioning to a more stable life.

"We in Jambi Province are different from those who moved outside, sir. We have completely stopped. Perhaps because it's easy to get caught in this small area, we chose to completely stop and find other work." (Informant AM, 39 years old)

## DISCUSSION

### **1. Dynamics of prostitution changes after red-light district closure**

The results of this study indicate that the closure of the Pucuk Jambi red-light district has resulted in dramatic changes in the prostitution landscape in the region. This finding aligns with research by Rahmadonna et al. (2021) examining the impact of red-light district closures in Indonesia, which found that red-light district closure policies tended to encourage sex workers to relocate to other areas or change their modus operandi rather than completely halting prostitution.(5)

Research by Oliveira et al. (2020) in Brazil also found a similar pattern, where the closure of prostitution tolerance zones resulted in the geographic dispersion of sex workers across various regions, complicating health monitoring and STD prevention efforts.(6) This confirms that a repressive approach to prostitution without adequate rehabilitation programs and economic alternatives tends to be counterproductive. The decline in the number of sex workers in Pucuk Jambi reported by informants in this study is consistent with the findings of Syakarofath & Bintari (2022) who documented changes in prostitution patterns in Indonesia following the implementation of anti-red-light district policies, with sex workers tending to operate underground or moving to larger cities.(7)

### **2. Migration patterns and distribution of sex workers**

The findings of this study reveal an organized migration pattern of sex workers, primarily distributed to Batam (6 individuals), Java (10 individuals), and Pekanbaru (3 individuals), while only 4 individuals remained in Jambi Province. This pattern reflects the phenomenon of spatial mobility of sex workers driven by economic and security factors. Zhang et al.'s (2021) research in China on sex worker mobility found that the migration of sex workers from peripheral areas to urban centers was influenced by three main factors: 1) higher income potential, 2) greater anonymity in large cities, and 3) better access to health infrastructure. (8) These three factors were also identified in this study through the narratives of pimp informants.

The findings regarding referral networks between pimps align with the concept of "social network theory" in prostitution studies. Cunningham & Kendall (2020), in their study of the modern prostitution market, explained that communication technology and social networks among sex industry players have created a more mobile and decentralized market.(9) This reinforces the study's finding that pimps in Pucuk Jambi have coordination networks with pimps in other cities to facilitate the movement of sex workers. The massive migration of sex workers outside Jambi Province can also be explained through the framework of "push-pull migration theory." Push factors include the closure of red-light districts, the intensity of raids, and high social stigma in Jambi, while pull factors include greater economic opportunities,

operational security, and anonymity in destination cities. This pattern is consistent with the findings of Platt et al. (2021) in a multi-country study of sex worker migration in Southeast Asia.(10)

The four sex workers interviewed in Jambi Province demonstrated various transition strategies out of prostitution: entrepreneurship (Muara Bungo), marriage and housewifery (Bangko Merangin), decreased activity due to age (Tungkal), and business diversification (Merlung). These findings provide important insights into the factors that facilitate exit from prostitution. Sanders & Shdaimah (2022), in their comprehensive study of exit pathways from prostitution, identified several key factors that facilitate exit: 1) access to economic capital or alternative business opportunities, 2) social support, including a spouse, 3) age and health, and 4) transferable skills. (11) All four sex worker informants in this study demonstrated at least one of these factors. The case of informant AM in Muara Bungo, who successfully established a fried food and coconut ice business, aligns with the findings of Bungay et al. (2020) who emphasized the importance of access to capital and entrepreneurial skills in facilitating the transition out of prostitution.(12) Their research in Canada showed that micro-credit programs and entrepreneurship training were effective in helping former sex workers build new lives.

## CONCLUSIONS

The former Pucuk Jambi location no longer functions as a prostitution center, as most sex workers have now moved outside the province. Furthermore, some who work within the province no longer work in prostitution, citing reasons such as having businesses, marriage, being housewives, or advancing age.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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## DECLARATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE

We hereby confirm that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools or methodologies were utilized at any stage of this study, including during data collection, analysis, visualization or manuscript preparation. All work presented in this study was conducted manually by the authors without the assistance of AI-based tools or systems.

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