

CHILD TRAFFICKING AND PROSTITUTION

Worldwide, approximately ten million children are engaged in some form of the sex industry. Each year at least one million children, mostly girls, become prostitutes.¹ In Asia alone, at least one million children are being exploited sexually and commercially in bars, in brothels, and on the streets. Country-by-country estimates are equally grim. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, it is estimated that ten thousand children are engaged in prostitution. In just the coastal areas of Sri Lanka, it is thought that approximately thirty-six thousand boys are exploited as prostitutes. In Taiwan, the number of children exploited in prostitution by local and foreign customers ranges from forty thousand to sixty thousand.² The numbers are so staggering that they threaten to completely overwhelm the human dimension of the problem, the exploited child remaining ensnared in a tangled and growing web. The Global Fund for Children (GFC) is one of the few organizations that provide funding to innovative grassroots organizations around the world that are fighting against this flourishing international industry and attempting to save the exploited children, one child at a time.

An Overview of the Problem: The Commercial and Sexual Exploitation of Children

There are three major and interrelated forms of commercial and sexual exploitation of children: prostitution, trafficking for sexual purposes, and pornography. Other forms of sexual exploitation of children include the sex tourism industry and the practice of early marriages. Prostitution and trafficking in children are highly lucrative industries, generating billions of dollars in revenue each year and operating with impunity.³ According to the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, prostitution and the trafficking of women and children for prostitution is the third-largest income earner globally, following drug trafficking and arms sales.⁴

The nature of child pornography has changed dramatically because of the advent of new technologies. Digital cameras and video recorders have made production of images easier and less expensive, and, because a third party is no longer required to develop these images, the risk of detection has decreased. In addition, the ubiquity of the Internet has facilitated the global distribution of images, making detection as well as prosecution more difficult.

Child sex tourism occurs throughout the world but is concentrated in Asia and Central and South America. While more than 250,000 sex tourists visit Asia every year from all parts of the globe, the child sex industry has exploded in recent years in countries in Central and South America. For example, in Colombia there was a 500 percent increase in the sexual exploitation of children aged eight to thirteen from 1986 to 1993.⁵ In addition, the practice of marrying girls at a young age is a common form of sexual exploitation in many parts of the world, especially sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The tradition of child marriages continues for a host of reasons, including families' efforts to alleviate poverty, men's fears of acquiring HIV, families' desires to "protect" their daughters, and forced abductions. Unfortunately, many of these young women, once

¹ Australian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, "Information for Students: Children and Sexual Exploitation," December 2, 2001, <<http://www.hreoc.gov.au>>.

² United States Fund for UNICEF, "Issue Summary: Sexual Exploitation of Children," December 8, 2001, <<http://www.unicefusa.org>>.

³ ECPAT International, "Frequently Asked Questions about CSEC," no date listed, <<http://www.ecpat.net>>.

⁴ Australian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission.

⁵ Australian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission and United States Fund for UNICEF.

married, face prolonged domestic violence and eventual abandonment, igniting a downward spiral into extreme poverty that also increases their risk of entering the commercial sex trade.⁶

In most of the world, girls are more at risk for commercial and sexual exploitation than are boys. However, in certain countries, boys and young men are targeted specifically by sex tourists. So-called “beach boys” or “hanky-panky boys” can be found in tourist destinations in Sri Lanka, Kenya, Gambia, and the Dominican Republic. In fact, in Sri Lanka and North Africa, it is more common for boys to work as prostitutes than for girls. In addition, researchers report that in Eastern Europe, boys appear to comprise a larger proportion of child prostitutes than do girls.⁷ The short- and long-term impacts on children victimized by commercial and sexual exploitation are enormous and include exposure to physical violence, profound psychological effects, and a high risk for sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. (One Cambodian NGO estimated that 70 percent of the girls rescued from brothels in that country were infected with HIV.)⁸

Children remain vulnerable to commercial and sexual exploitation for many reasons, notably poverty. As former South African president Nelson Mandela stated, “As a contributory factor to sexual exploitation, poverty cannot be underestimated when we consider that young people are often forced to the streets to make a living, or parents sell their children sexually as a means of income.”⁹ In addition, the AIDS epidemic has contributed to the exploitation of and trafficking in children. Children are increasingly sought out by sexual exploiters who mistakenly believe that children are less likely to be HIV-positive or that sex with children can actually cure HIV infection.¹⁰ Discrimination against certain racial and ethnic groups is another major cause of child exploitation. For example, a recent Save the Children Canada report revealed that while aboriginal youth compose only three to five percent of the general population, they constitute approximately 90 percent of child prostitutes in many areas of the world. Finally, other causal factors include domestic abuse in families with children; armed conflict that often separates children from parents; limited access to education; rising numbers of street children and AIDS orphans; harmful traditions and customs; and the rise of consumerism.¹¹

The Global Fund for Children’s Response to the Problem: Funding Effective Grassroots Organizations

As mentioned earlier, the Global Fund for Children is one of the few organizations that make targeted investments in grassroots organizations working to eliminate the commercial and sexual exploitation of children. Founded in 1994, the Global Fund for Children identifies and invests in innovative community-based educational programs for poor children around the world. We have come to recognize that some of the most creative projects operate on a small scale, exist in marginal locations, and have few contacts in philanthropic networks. Through our intermediary grant-making program, we support nonformal educational programs that integrate basic education with awareness building and training in reproductive health, hygiene, vocational skills, environmental issues, microenterprise development, human rights issues, conflict resolution,

⁶ ECPAT International.

⁷ ECPAT International and Australian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission.

⁸ ECPAT International.

⁹ President Nelson Mandela, “Message to the World Congress,” (statement issued by the Office of the President at the World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Children, Stockholm, Sweden, August 27, 1996).

¹⁰ B. Harris. “*The AIDS epidemic Has Both Been a Cause and a Consequence of the Trade in Children: AIDS Agencies Stress New Threat to Child Sex Workers*,” (paper presented at the World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Children, Stockholm, Sweden, August 28, 1996).

¹¹ ECPAT International.

computer skills, and artistic expression. GFC is particularly sensitive to the distinct needs of boys and girls, AIDS orphans, street children, child laborers, and other vulnerable groups of children and youth.

Ayuda y Solidaridad con las Niñas de la Calle (Aid and Solidarity with Street Girls)
Mexico City, Mexico

The Global Fund for Children has funded a number of community-based organizations committed to assisting exploited children. In Mexico City, Mexico, we support Ayuda y Solidaridad con las Ninas de la Calle, an organization that runs three youth centers for girls aged eight to eighteen who have been victims of prostitution, violence, and drug addiction. The girls receive technical and vocational training and are provided with safe and nurturing environments.

Prerana (Inspiration)
Mumbai, India

In the Kamathipura red-light district of Mumbai, India, GFC is funding Prerana, a holistic social-services program for female prostitutes and their children. As a response to the high level of second-generation prostitution among these children, Prerana established a night care center, the first of its kind anywhere in the world, that provides shelter, food, and other support for the children of prostitutes while they ply their trade.

Protecting Environment and Children Everywhere
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Protecting Environment and Children Everywhere (PEACE), located in Colombo, Sri Lanka, provides nonformal education, including awareness building in reproductive health and hygiene, and vocational training programs that give street boys and girls aged eleven to fourteen the skills they need to secure legitimate employment. PEACE targets those children who have dropped out of school to serve the growing tourist industry through various types of work, including prostitution.

GFC also continues to work closely with other relevant organizations, including the international policy maker End Child Prostitution and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT). ECPAT is a network of organizations and individuals in over fifty countries working together for the elimination of child prostitution, child pornography, and trafficking of children for sexual purposes. ECPAT has worked with the Global Fund for Children to help identify potential grantees. For example, GFC staff, on the recommendation of ECPAT, recently visited and decided to fund the Movement for the International Self-Development of Solidarity (MAIS), an innovative organization in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. MAIS's mission is to prevent the sexual exploitation of boys, girls, and adolescents in the Dominican Republic, especially in the sex tourism industry.

Conclusion

The elimination of the commercial and sexual exploitation of children around the world is a daunting task, but one that is achievable if effective programs such as Prerana, PEACE, and MAIS receive the support and recognition they deserve and if their voices are included among those working to improve the life chances of exploited children. The Global Fund for Children has played a critical role in finding and supporting these organizations and believes that with ongoing resources and redoubled commitment, concerned global citizens can provide affected children with renewed hopes and enhanced life opportunities.