



Signs of
HOPE
in the
CITY

Renewing
Urban Mission,
Embracing
Radical Hope

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Trafficking and Exploitation in the Urban Context

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Trafficking and exploitation are currently taking centre stage as a social concern amongst many churches in the West, but many churches do not feel prepared or able to do something about it. This chapter will explore some of the issues of trafficking and exploitation occurring in the urban context and will look at some research and some case studies of organizations that have tried to do something about it within their communities.

Children Rather Than Adults Seen As Victims

The focus of intervention has primarily been on helping children who are seen as vulnerable and different from adults, who are seen as having choice in their involvement. Children are seen to be less able to navigate risks and threats, they have less negotiating power with pimps, traffickers, and society, and they have less control or influence over their lives. However, the reality is that in the context of poverty adults as well as children have very few actual choices available to them and, even if they say they chose to be involved in sex work, there will be a number of push-pull factors that are leading to this decision, including the strong cultural obligations they may feel to support their families.

Child Trafficking for Sexual Purposes

Different countries have different definitions of whether prostitution is legal or not depending on the age of the person involved. This cut-off age can be related to the age

of consent or the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines a child as under 18 years. Whenever a child is involved in sexual exploitation and/or trafficking, whether they “chose” to be involved or not, it is still considered to be illegal, but it becomes harder to prosecute someone for having sex with a minor when they are over the age of consent, because they are then often said to have consented.

A child is treated as a sexual object and for commercial gains and can be used for prostitution and/or the making of pornography. There is a demand for sexual services from children or there would not be the supply. Sometimes labour exploitation can turn into sexual exploitation as well, e.g., a child working as a domestic helper can be raped by the men in the household.

Trafficking vs. Migration

Although trafficking does not necessarily involve movement, trafficking is different from smuggling of migrants and migration because the victim is intended to be exploited by the persons involved in managing the movement from one location to another. People can be trafficked from rural to urban areas and across border areas, usually from poorer to more wealthy countries. Countries can be receiving, transiting, or sending countries but some countries are receiving, transit, and sending countries.

Places Where Children Are Sexually Exploited

With the increasing use of the Internet and mobile phones, and with the positive pressure from the international community and media, it is becoming less common now for children to be found in “brothels”, especially in main cities. However, the more mobile way of pimping remains, where children are brought to the customer. The children are still owned by adults who control the children — and they keep most or all of the money paid by customers for sex with children. Contacts with customers in cities are made in bars, hotels, massage parlours, Internet cafes, and clubs. Sometimes children sell sex on the street, where adult “pimps” may control them, and these areas become known to paedophiles. The pimps may move the children around if they sense any threat. Sometimes the sex takes place in the customer’s home or where the child or the pimp lives. Some children are exploited in schools by their teachers in exchange for good grades.¹ Children who do not live with their own families in residential care centres and orphanages are vulnerable to be exploited by staff or others who know they can access children this way.

1 Plan West Africa, “Break the Silence: Prevent Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in and around Schools in Africa,” (2014), <http://www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk/sites/default/files/break_the_silence_en.pdf>.

Factors Leading to Increased Child Trafficking

Women’s unequal status can lead to child trafficking, including the development policies which aggravate the marginalization of women. Globalization of the sex industry also contributes to this, including sex tourism. Countries which depend on tourism for their economy may intentionally or unintentionally promote sex tourism in their country as a development policy. Although tourists from the North who are using prostitutes may only be a small percentage of the overall number of sex buyers, they are still significant because of the money they bring into a country.

There is currently mass/global marketing of sex through pornography, including children as objects, in new information technologies that are accessible and affordable, especially to young men (e.g., smart phones). There is also aggressive recruitment of labour and trafficking syndicates in rural and urban areas.

A Feminist and Human Rights Analysis of Trafficking

The sex industry and its growth are commonly predicated on male-centred ideological assumptions that sex is a male right and entitlement, as well as a commodity that should be readily accessible to men. Women are seen to be sexualized commodities functional to that male right. Trafficking is rooted in this stereotypical construction of the social roles of women and men. It constitutes one of the most serious violations of human rights of women, men, transgender people, and children.

Men Usually the Perpetrators

Although there are some men who want to pay for sex with children, adult and adolescent prostitutes often work together in the same places, so some customers do not know that the prostitute they pay for is still legally a child. They may not be interested in children, but be looking for beauty and freshness. Research in Cambodia found that local sex buyers were really only interested in young women 16 to 22 years who were still “young and fresh”.² Other men may look for a younger prostitute because this makes them feel more powerful or younger, or more masculine. They do not necessarily look for a child, but for a woman who looks and acts like a child.

There are also increasing numbers of younger men — around the age of 15 years — who are initiated to prove they are men by older family members or by peers who may choose for them an older (and therefore experienced) prostitute. In Cambodia, prostitutes are known to be gang raped (“*bauk*”) by young men in hotels. Previously

2 Annuska Derks, “Trafficking of Vietnamese Women and Children to Cambodia,” (1998), <<http://no-trafficking.org/content/pdf/annuska%20derks%20trafficking%20of%20vietnamese%20women%20to%20cambodia%201998.pdf>>.

this was done by university students but now is also known to include high school students.³

Male Vulnerability

Trafficking is often seen as gendered:

- **The Supply:** Young, poor, and vulnerable women/girls who are escaping poverty, conflict, and the displacement caused by natural disasters are the targets of syndicates, traffickers, illegal recruiters, and brothel owners.
- **The Demand:** Businessmen, professionals, transport workers, seafarers, military forces, transient and migrant workers, and ordinary men create the market for sex.

But what about boys?

Men and boys are also sexually exploited. Although most information and services about children in prostitution focus on girls, gradually information is increasing about boys who are exploited in prostitution. Some of the earlier research of boys being sexually exploited was in South Asia.

Three ECPAT studies showed different ways in which boys were used:

1. A small study of the exploitation of boys in prostitution in Hyderabad (India) reported few pimps and largely female customers.⁴
2. In Lahore and Peshawar (Pakistan) researchers described boys having sex with older men in long-term relationships that were not always based on money.⁵
3. The exploitation of boys in prostitution in Bangladesh was found to be a traditional practice, based in hotels, in homes, and on the street. Pimps controlled the boys through fear and violence.⁶

3 Tong Soprach, "Gang Rape: The Perspectives of Moto-Taxi Drivers across Cambodia: A Rapid Country Wide Assessment," (2005), <<http://iussp2005.princeton.edu/papers/51190>>.

4 Sree Lakshmi Akula and Anil Raghuvanshi, "Situational Analysis Report on Prostitution of Boys in India (Hyderabad)," (2006), <http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/ecpat_06_sarop_of_boys_in_india_250806.pdf>.

5 Tufail Muhammad and Naeem Zafar, "Situational Analysis Report on Prostitution of Boys in Pakistan (Lahore & Peshawar)," (2006), <<http://www.humantrafficking.org/publications/443>>.

6 A.K.M. Masud Ali and Ratan Sarkar, "The Boys and the Bullies: A Situational Analysis Report on Prostitution of Boys in Bangladesh," (2006), <<http://www.humantrafficking.org/publications/445>>.

What About Transgender People?

In many cities in Asia transgender people have a high profile. For example, in India, the *hijira* (transgender communities) take in boys who are more feminine in behaviour. They are generally a despised and "invisible" group. How much they are coerced is unknown. Boys very often have to work in prostitution and may later be castrated in an unsafe religious ceremony. The *hijira* communities are very challenging to access but there have been some faith-based organizations and churches that have started to work with them, e.g., IMCARES in Mumbai, India. In discussion with transgender people in Asia, they often say that they have absolutely no alternative employment apart from begging and occasional dancing at weddings. Very few individuals or NGOs have been looking at the situation of transgender people from a child rights perspective or simply seeing them as human beings. Instead, the focus has overwhelmingly been on sexuality rights and HIV/AIDS risk.

What About Women Seeking Boys?

There is little evidence so far that female customers seek pre-pubertal boys but this doesn't mean that it doesn't happen. However, female tourists looking for temporary, exotic, young male partners have been known to have done so for decades. This is a well established phenomenon in certain areas (e.g., in Thailand and Bali in Indonesia). Clients often see it as a "holiday romance" rather than prostitution. The idea that women can be sex tourists in the same way as men has been disputed but the similarities may outweigh the differences.

Where Do We See Signs of Hope?

In our meetings with individuals working with different ministries we see some clear signs of hope.

Redeeming Roses, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia⁷

- RR is building relationships of trust between the church and community.
- They were seen to be passionate people who are actually going out and *doing* it.
- Around 10 percent of the church is involved in volunteering with social projects.

7 <http://redeemingrosesministry.blogspot.com>

- They base what they are doing on a foundation of prayer.
- They have faithful funders, but also see the need to be creative in seeking resources.
- They emphasize how they are not constrained by time — working one person at a time, one church at a time. As long as it takes.

Good Shepherd Sisters, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia⁸

- We were impressed with their wide and comprehensive understanding of trafficking/exploitation issues and surrounding context.
- Unlike many organizations they have a comprehensive strategy from the time the survivor comes into care until reintegration.
- They are not afraid to challenge the Government and have a reputation for their persistence with the Government.
- They are involved in diverse networking with embassies, UN, INGOs, local authorities, and churches, etc.
- They are not afraid to share their faith within government shelters.

Message Parlour, Phnom Penh, Cambodia⁹

- They have excellent collaboration with a variety of organizations/bodies from secular to faith, police to church.
- They were innovative and creative to the context that evolved, as they were in the context longer: e.g., they added a program for children in the area as the need for a safe space for children became apparent.
- They see their role as empowering the local NGO/church communities to tackle these issues.
- They are involved in doing research that shed light on vulnerable groups, providing evidence for advocacy, access, and improving programs.
- They have a reputation for listening to people, listening to victims, listening to NGOs, and then allowing for an appropriate response.

8 <http://goodshepherd.my>

9 <http://www.themessageparlour.org>

Where Do We See Challenges to Hope?

The challenges in these contexts were also extensive.

Redeeming Roses

- A big challenge was overcoming the church's fear of gangs/pimps.
- Alternatively — the apathetic and often unwelcoming environment of the church to marginal groups (sex workers/transgender).
- They described a lack of males involved at every level.
- They said that there was an overwhelming challenge in keeping forward motion when it takes so long to see tangible change. No instant results.
- It was often challenging for survivors to be reintegrated into society.
- They were frustrated by the government complacency about such a significant issue.

Good Shepherd Sisters

- Their role was often fighting corruption at a variety of levels.
- Sometimes difficult not to be overwhelmed by the scope of the problem, yet little engagement from many quarters to address it.
- They described the poor functionality of existing networks.
- They described a distinct lack of space to care for survivors and lack of funding for the same.
- They mentioned a dissonance between government policies and practice where there is a gap in which many survivors are unable to be provided with shelter.
- They were frustrated by the lack of implementation of the law.

The Message Parlour

- They described a lack of human resources — volunteers willing to be involved.
- They were frustrated by a lack of funding — particularly for “gap” groups such as sexually exploited males/transgender people.

- They said that sometimes they were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem — that they could only help a few at a time.
- They described how often the supporter community has little understanding of the real needs and scope of trafficking and exploitation, and this led to a very simplistic, stereotyped understanding of what trafficking/exploitation really looks like (i.e., “little girls behind bars”). This needed constant challenging.
- They noticed that there was little being done to challenge clients/address demand apart from prosecution of paedophiles. However, they collaborated with GLUE Ministries in reaching out to men frequenting the red light areas. There is a need to address demand because that’s where it starts.
- There was little public understanding of the importance of consent in sex especially among male clients of prostitutes.
- There was seen to be an inability to affirm the humanity and brokenness on both sides: victim/survivor and buyer/perpetrator.

Responses of the Church and Faith Based Organisations So Far

The emphasis has tended to be on practice rather than advocacy or research. There has been some rescue but those doing this have not always considered adequate follow-up e.g., shelters and re-integration. There have been some attempts at vocational training although this is nearly always for girls rather than boys or *hijira* and it hasn’t always been useful in the long term.

However, now there is a move to explore re-integration and sustainable livelihoods. Many people are learning what to do “on the job” but there is a move to do more thorough training, e.g., DPTA/CPTA, Celebrating Children, Hands that Heal. There are some attempts to appeal for legal reform/implementation. There is some attempt to develop or improve child protection policies.

How Have We Addressed the Issue?

- Rescue efforts have not always matched aftercare facilities.
- Practice is often not evidence-based.

- There has been criticism by secular groups of spiritual abuse — which may be justified in some cases? For example, children are sometimes required to repeatedly give testimonies about painful experiences, which is in itself exploitive.
- Counselling is often not carefully constructed and may be given by non-professionals. All staff need to be trained in listening effectively to children.
- Sometimes organizations have been afraid of reintegrating children into their “wicked” communities so hold on to them longer than should be necessary, sometimes to the point where re-integration is much harder.
- We need to address our own prejudices in the church against prostitutes, boys, and *hijira* so that they can feel welcome in the church.
- We need to learn how to reach out to men where they are at, addictions and all. We need to be good role models.
- We must inform children about sex and pornography before they learn elsewhere, including through harmful pornography.

Advocacy Challenges

- How can we effectively advocate for children?
- We need to engage with the UNCRC even if we don’t agree with everything.
- We need to know our facts and we can only do this through systematic research. We need to be truthful and accurate in informing others — exaggerating or fabricating is lying.
- We need to get a balance between seeing children as vulnerable but also resilient.
- We need to see young people over 18 years as not much less vulnerable than under 18 years.
- We need to find out who the stakeholders are and be prepared to work with them, even if they have different standpoints, e.g., media, gay rights activists, teachers, secular NGOs.

Recommendations to the Church

Engaging Men

- We need to be better at engaging men. Presently, the response to this issue seems to be largely female. There is a need to engage more males to tackle this issue.
- Men need to be better role models in treating people with dignity at every level, especially the most vulnerable.
- We need to mentor and encourage young men and old to be men of integrity and to treat women with dignity and hope. We need to challenge the common mind-set of men in their hesitancy about engaging with marginal groups in society (e.g., transgender).
- Fathers, husbands, and brothers should be encouraged to uphold the sacredness of sexuality, helping to build a strong family.

Engaging Women

- We need to encourage women to be more involved in reaching out to women in red light areas and welcoming prostitutes into the church.
- We need to encourage women to treat men with dignity and hope.
- Mothers, wives, and sisters need to uphold the sacredness of sexuality (including role models for children), helping build a strong family.
- There needs to be mentoring of younger women by older experienced women in the church.

Engaging Youth

- We need to encourage youth towards a greater involvement with vulnerable children.
- We need to engage older youth to function as transformative agents within marginal groups within red light areas / bars / clubs.
- We need youth to receive teaching about vulnerability and resilience.

Engaging Sexuality

- There is a need for open, safe spaces where we can talk about sex and sexuality within the church.
- We need to deal with taboos (including cultural taboos within an Asian context) about sex/sexuality within the church.
- We need to be welcoming people from within the LGBT community, ensuring that the church is a safe place that can be called “home” by everyone.
- We need to deal with fears among Christian leadership and challenge them about why we are not comfortable to talk about these issues.
- We need to enquire about the expectations for Christian leadership in regards to their own sexuality? Are they able to be fellow humans with sexualities, as well?
- We need to promote the development of sexuality without repression, fostering honesty and accountability when it comes to porn, lust, and sex outside of marriage.
- We must engage the church in addressing the “demand” for prostituted people, first by talking about sexual abuse/sexual exploitation of members of the church and the surrounding community.
- We must address porn as a driving factor for abuse/exploitation.

Conclusion

Trafficking and exploitation are widespread today. They are pressing problems for societies and churches. While we see signs of hope, many churches do not feel prepared or able to do something about it. Organisations and churches must work together to engage issues surrounding the trafficking and exploitation of men, women, and youth. We need fresh approaches to advocacy, sexuality, and justice.

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