

A young sex worker leans against the bars of a brothel where she lives and works in the red-light area of Dacca, Bangladesh. A significant number of girls in Bangladesh and around the world become sex workers as the result of abduction or coercion. Many exploited girls are held in virtual captivity by their pimps and “mamas”, who force as many clients on them as they can find.

Image: Martin Alder/Panos

# child prostitution and pornography

In 1986, approximately 20,000 children in the Philippines were involved in the sex trade. In 2000, the estimate rose fivefold to 100,000.<sup>1</sup> Between 20 percent and 50 percent of prostitutes in Lithuania are believed to be minors. Children as young as age 11 are known to work as brothel prostitutes, and children from children's homes — some as young as 10 or 12 years of age — have been used in pornographic movies.<sup>2</sup> In Cambodia, the average age at which children enter the sex trade dropped from age 18 in 1992 to age 13 or 14 in 1994, while in Taiwan, the average age is between 11 and 15.<sup>3</sup>

In Asia, an estimated one million children in the sex industry are held in conditions that are indistinguishable from slavery.<sup>4</sup> When 100,000 Indian commercial sex workers were asked the age at which they entered the industry, 40 percent said they had started before age 18.<sup>5</sup>

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## The global child-sex trade

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that one million children around the world enter the sex trade every year, the majority of them girls.<sup>6</sup> The International Labour Organization's figures from 2000 indicated that as many as 1.8 million children were being exploited in prostitution and pornography worldwide, with girls representing 80 percent to 90 percent of the victims in most countries.<sup>7</sup> Other estimates have put the number of children engaged in sex work significantly higher, closer to 10 million.<sup>8</sup>

Global approximations such as these are really nothing more than educated guesses. The clandestine nature of commercial sexual exploitation, coupled with the fact that many of the world's sexually exploited children exist in society's blind spot, means that untold numbers of these children — the majority of whom are poor,

uneducated, homeless and rejected by society — will never be captured in any statistic. These are just three of their stories:

"Rachel", a 12-year-old Albanian who worked in a local cigarette factory, was taken to Italy and forced to work as a prostitute by her 29-year-old husband three months after they married. If she refused to sell herself on the streets, he beat her. "I worked morning to night every day," said Rachel, who serviced as many as 10 clients daily to earn the US \$250 that her pimping husband demanded of her.<sup>9</sup>

"Sarah", from the United States, was 10 years old when she was sexually molested live on camera by her friend's father. The camera was connected to his computer, which allowed him to take simultaneous instructions from members of an Internet-based paedophile club about how to molest her. He later traded the images on the Internet.<sup>10</sup>

“Saida”, a Kenyan, dropped out of school when she was 15 to take care of her sick mother. After her mother died, Saida began cooking and selling beans to help support her siblings. Once, when the family had no food, Saida agreed to have sex with a young man in her neighbourhood, with the understanding that he would give her money in return. According to Saida, “He gave me 300 to 500 shillings [approximately \$4 to \$7] when I slept with him, and this helped. But I worried about diseases since I knew he was sleeping with other women.”<sup>11</sup>

Rachel, Sarah and Saida are among the lucky few who managed to extricate themselves from a cycle of abuse. Rachel was rescued by an antitrafficking organization and returned to her family in Albania. She later received financial aid to enrol in a vocational-training programme. Sarah, after initially denying that she had been molested by her friend’s father, disclosed the abuse with the support of her mother. Her testimony in turn assisted the police in sending the perpetrator to jail and led to the first major international police effort to apprehend Internet paedophiles. Women in her community told Saida about a local programme to help girls who are either at risk of entering or already are engaged in commercial sex work. Through that project, she plans to take a hairdressing course and to get her three younger sisters back into school.

Most sexually exploited children are not as fortunate. Thea Pumbroek was six years old when she died of a cocaine overdose while being filmed for one of the many pornographic videos in which she was forced to feature. Few people know of her tragic life and death: “She seems to have been treated in death as little more than the object she had been in life.”<sup>12</sup>

## Defining commercial sexual exploitation of children

Experts agree that sexual exploitation of children is hardly a new phenomenon. It has existed in various forms in every culture around the world as far back as “the most remote stages of the history of mankind.”<sup>13</sup> However, the more recent forces of globalisation, internationalisation and free trade have conspired to produce “what appears to be a dramatic increase worldwide” in the buying and selling of children for sexual purposes.<sup>14</sup>

In the modern world, young girls and boys are forced or coerced into prostitution, trafficked for sex within and across borders, sold into sexual

slavery or exploited for the purposes of pornography and sex tourism. All of these activities constitute commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC).<sup>\*</sup> Although there is no universal definition for the term, CSEC generally describes sexual abuse of children that is primarily economically driven.<sup>15</sup>

Any child who is seduced, coerced or forced to engage in sex for material gain is being commercially exploited. While money is very often the mode of exchange, CSEC also can involve the trade of food,

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shelter, protection, drugs or other goods and services. In some cases, such as the production and sale of pornography, a child may be exploited for commercial purposes without any exchange of money or goods between the child and his/her exploiter.

The person who engages in sexual activity with the child is the direct exploiter. Universally, the majority of direct exploiters are men. Some are paedophiles — adults who are sexually aroused by prepubescent and pubescent boys or girls. Others do not necessarily conform to the conventional definition of a paedophile but nevertheless target children because they believe they are less likely to contract sexually transmitted diseases. Still others may use children simply out of convenience or curiosity and are indifferent to their young age.<sup>16</sup>

There are also networks of other exploiters, such as pimps, traffickers, family members and members of organized crime, who may not necessarily engage in direct sexual activity with a child, but who facilitate child sexual exploitation for financial or material gain. Men are well-represented in the ranks of these “third-party” exploiters, but women also figure prominently as organizers and beneficiaries. In some settings, women are the essential and even primary promoters of the child-sex trade. Too often these women, and to a lesser degree their

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<sup>\*</sup>As trafficking of girls and women is discussed in detail in Chapter 7, the focus of this chapter will be primarily on child prostitution and pornography. It is important, however, to note that all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children are strongly interrelated and that one type often contributes to another. Children may be trafficked for prostitution, for example, and then exploited by sex tourists and made to participate in the production of pornography.

“Angelica”, who is 14 years old and works as a prostitute in Riga, Latvia. During the day she meets with friends and plays in the amusement arcades. By night, she works in the red-light district before returning to the flat where she lives, and where one tap of running water serves many families.

Image: Jorgen Hildebrandt/Panos



**Pornographic DVDs exchange hands in Kabul, Afghanistan. Some Afghan cities have seen a significant rise in the availability of pornography since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. Internet availability and DVD technology have brought about a huge global increase in access to pornography, with sex-related sites consistently being the most visited sites on the World Wide Web.**

**Image: Fredrik Neumann/Panos**

**The pimp of a Thai sex worker in Johannesburg, South Africa, is arrested after a police raid. He is being charged with possession of a large number of Asian-made child pornography DVDs.**

**Image: Mariella Furrer**

male counterparts, are “yesterday’s exploited children, who are today exploiting the children who will become tomorrow’s exploiters.”<sup>17</sup>

For many third-party exploiters, greed is a major incentive, reinforced by traditions or beliefs that deny children their basic rights. In some instances, the same circumstances that propel children into the sex trade also drive third-party exploiters: poverty, lack of economic alternatives, little or no education, domestic violence, drug addiction, gender inequities and other forms of social discrimination or exclusion.<sup>18</sup> Despite any shared circumstances, exploiters always have the advantage

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over the children they abuse. By definition, in every case of commercial sexual exploitation of a child, maximum benefits accrue to the exploiter, and the child’s rights and wellbeing are abrogated, regardless of whether the child engages willingly in the sexual activity.<sup>19</sup>

As with noncommercial child sexual abuse, issues of consent are considered by law to be irrelevant if the child is under a certain age. In some countries, all pornography and/or prostitution is illegal, regardless of the age of the person involved. In a growing number of countries, trafficking is a crime. Even so, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography has expressed concern that in many parts of the world child-sexual-exploitation offences are not considered crimes.<sup>20</sup>

Where pornography and/or prostitution are legal, and where there is also a relatively low age of consent, children may be at greater risk of specific forms of commercial sexual exploitation, such as sex tourism. But even in countries where prostitution and/or pornography are banned, the tendency of criminal justice systems to punish sex workers more aggressively than sex exploiters combined with the “underground” nature of the sex industry, means that children caught in the sex trade in these settings may be among the most difficult of all sexually exploited children to reach and assist.<sup>21</sup>

### Child prostitution in the contemporary world

In 1998, the *Economist* estimated that the global sex industry generates \$20 billion each year, one-quarter of which is the result of child prostitution.<sup>24</sup> Many countries “have come to depend on the sale of

women’s and children’s services almost like a cash crop.”<sup>25</sup> The highest numbers of prostituted children — some as young as 10 years of age — are thought to be in Brazil, India, China, Thailand and the United States, but the child sex trade is an international problem.<sup>26</sup>

Most child prostitutes are integrated into mainstream prostitution markets. They generally are not targeted by abusers because of their young age. There are exceptions, however. Paedophilia is one. Another is the increasing demand in prostitution markets for “virgins”. Young girls are sold over and over again — by pimps, brothel owners, within strip clubs, etc. — under the false pretence of being free from sexually transmitted diseases by virtue of their “virgin” status.<sup>26</sup> Yet another exception is child-sex tourism — where people travel, often with the assistance of Internet-based tour operators, to other countries to engage in commercial sex acts with children. The destinations typically have a lower legal age of sexual consent than the sex tourist’s home country or comparatively lax law enforcement. According to the International Tribunal for Children’s Rights, “Sex tours enable men and women who would not identify with the label paedophile to travel to exotic places where they feel able to step outside whatever sexual mores may constrain them at home, because they believe these rules do not exist in foreign cultures. Powerful forces of racism, misogyny, neo-colonialism and economic exploitation combine to sell ‘exotic’ and ‘erotic’ sex vacations.”<sup>26</sup>

In some settings, there are longstanding traditions which dictate that women and girls automatically enter the sex industry — and that men work as pimps for their sisters, wives and daughters. The Rajnat men in Rajasthan, India, for example, have lived off the earnings of the females in their families for centuries. While Rajnat girls historically serviced the princely families in the Raj system, they now service local farmers and merchants. Such is the extent of their involvement in the commercial sex industry that wives are in short supply in certain communities. Even those men who manage to find spouses may be left to care for their children while their wives work within the sex industry. These families raise their daughters to do the same.<sup>27</sup>

### Noncommercial markets

Child prostitution also takes place outside commercial markets. In parts of Africa and Asia, some girls are offered or sold into sexual slavery by their families — who are seeking political assistance, economic benefit,

spiritual appeasement or all of the above. These children then serve priests, wealthy men or even — in the form of “temple prostitutes” — a deity.<sup>28</sup>

Street children of any culture might engage in “survival sex” for subsistence. So might other poor or socially marginalised children who lack any other resources or support. A study of adolescents in Zambia found that many girls have sex with their male peers in exchange for money or goods. While the girls acknowledged that poverty is their prime motivator, the boys explained that “having sex with girls is a way of proving that one is a man and it is a means of gaining popularity.”<sup>29</sup>

“Sugar daddy” relationships further extend this unequal power dynamic. The global phenomenon of the sugar daddy appears to be gaining popularity in sub-Saharan Africa, where older men — hoping to avoid exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases — coerce adolescents into sexual relationships by offering money, cell phones or other gifts. While the risk of exposure to disease may be reduced for the older man, it is more likely to be increased for the girl. Research suggests that girls in relationships with marked age asymmetries have less success negotiating condom use.<sup>30</sup> This, in fact, is true for all sexually exploited girls, regardless of whether their victimisation occurs in commercial or noncommercial settings.

Girls are not the only victims of the sex trade. Although data are still lacking, it is likely that in every country a considerable number of young boys also are sexually exploited. In Sri Lanka, significantly more boys than girls work as child prostitutes.<sup>31</sup> The Dominican Republic, Haiti,

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the Czech Republic, Egypt and Morocco are a sampling of destinations offering sex tourism involving young boys.<sup>32</sup> In Iraq, where the number of commercial sex workers has increased in the midst of political turmoil, hundreds of young boys are believed to be sexually exploited. Many of them work under the menacing control of street gangs. Sixteen-year-old Hassan, whose homosexuality is grounds for death under Iraq’s Islamic law, was forced into the commercial sex industry by a man who took pictures of Hassan while they were having sex. The man threatened to send the pictures to Hassan’s family if the child refused to be pimped out to other men.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the clear vulnerability of boys — especially those who are impoverished, gay or, for other reasons, cast out of society — the majority of child prostitutes in the world are girls. Their exploitation is in many ways an extension of gender norms and behaviours prevalent in the societies in which they are bought and sold. In Tokyo, for example, where a 2001 survey “found that 72 percent of teenage girls had been groped on their way to school,” a sex club offers clients a service called “ripping pants off a school girl”. Another option is to molest girls who are holding onto ceiling straps in a simulation of a subway train.<sup>34</sup>

## Child pornography in the contemporary world

Not surprisingly, Japan is a major Asian producer of child pornography.<sup>35</sup> Around the world, there are strong links between child prostitution, child-sex tourism and the production of child pornography.<sup>36</sup>

Girls and boys of all ages, including infants, are sexually exploited in pornographic imagery.<sup>37</sup> Both “a crime in and of itself, and ... a picture of a crime scene,” child pornography stretches back centuries.<sup>38</sup> In the last 30 years, however, it has become a thriving enterprise, with images that are more hardcore than before and increased access to those images via the Internet.<sup>39</sup>

Most paedophiles do not use child pornography to turn a profit. They are more likely to stockpile pictures and films that they can copy and trade, thereby adding to their private collection. Nevertheless, the advent of modern home video and personal computer technology has made child pornography progressively easier to produce and trade without detection. As a result, underground distribution has become more organized and commercialised. In the United States alone, the estimated revenues of the child pornography market are approximately \$2 billion to \$3 billion per year, making it one of the country’s most lucrative cottage industries. Russia is notable as an emerging market, second only to the United States as a source for child pornography.

In modern times, no region in the world is exempt from the production of child pornography. During the industry’s early days, most images were of Western children, many from the United States, whose pictures were commercially reproduced in Europe.<sup>40</sup> A minority of other images were from India, Mexico and Africa. With the growth in sex tourism, images of

Fifteen-year-old prostitutes in Birmingham, England.

Image: Karen Robinson/Panos



**A slave girl draws water for her master's household in Niger, where many slave children are born of rape. Regardless of their age, female slaves in Niger are exploited tirelessly by their masters for free labour, as sexual servants and as "slave breeders" of the next generation.**

**Image: Georgina Cranston/IRIN**

Asian and Eastern European children were added to the global stock and trade in child pornography, as sex tourists filmed and then distributed their encounters with children.<sup>41</sup> Latin American children also have been exploited on film by both international and local paedophiles and child abusers. In Brazil, street children in particular have been targeted for pornography that is exported to North America.<sup>42</sup>

Many victims of child pornography are boys. In the United States, over 50 percent of child pornography seized in raids depicts boys, and in Canada that figure is 75 percent. In Japan, however, girls are captured in the majority of images.<sup>43</sup> For both boys and girls, their exploitation on film can have a lasting psychological impact. Because of an almost inexhaustible shelf-life, pornographic images can continue to be reproduced and shared, such that “long after the child has grown up, he or she knows that someone, somewhere, may be looking at their picture, witnessing their degradation and distress.”<sup>44</sup> This has perhaps never been more true than in the age of the Internet.

Evidence suggests that a significant number of consumers of child pornography are likely to be active child abusers.<sup>45</sup> The Internet facilitates this link, because it “not only acts as a mechanism for making, displaying, trading, and distributing child porn, it also acts as a vehicle for child pornographers to make contact with and ensnare new victims.”<sup>46</sup> Child sex abusers can enter Internet chat rooms where children congregate, gain their trust and either solicit pictures of them online or arrange to meet them — sometimes travelling across continents — for the purposes of sexually abusing them.<sup>47</sup> One study from the United States found that one in five children who go online regularly is approached by Internet strangers for sex.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, the Internet allows paedophiles and child abusers to receive positive reinforcement in a way that can legitimise and normalise their criminal impulses and behaviours. According to one convicted paedophile, “The Internet is great. It’s a whole world that sucks you in. Within 24 hours of first going on I’d found child porn. ... I found people I could talk to. People who felt like me ... I never had so many friends.”<sup>49</sup>

## Global recognition of the problem

During the last decade of the 20th century, the international community gathered forces to stem the rising tide of commercial sexual exploitation

of children. In 1989 the United Nations General Assembly passed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which requires its signatories to protect children against all kinds of sexual exploitation and abuse. In 1991, the United Nations appointed its first Special Rapporteur to address the issue. And in 1996, 1,300 people from around the world gathered in Stockholm, Sweden, to participate in the First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

A ground-breaking outcome of the week-long Stockholm meeting was the unanimous adoption by 122 participating governments of a Declaration and Agenda for Action. The Agenda requires countries to

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“develop or strengthen and implement national laws to establish the criminal responsibility of service providers, customers, and intermediaries in child prostitution, child trafficking, child pornography, including possession of child pornography, and other unlawful sexual activity.”<sup>50</sup> It also calls on governments to “adopt a non-punitive approach to child victims of commercial sexual exploitation in keeping with the rights of the child.”<sup>51</sup> This Agenda was reiterated and reinforced five years later by participants of the Second World Congress, held in Yokohama, Japan.

In May 2000, the United Nations adopted a protocol specifically prohibiting the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In November of the same year, it passed the “Palermo Protocol”, which focuses on the prevention of and punishment for human trafficking, especially that of women and children. While these international instruments are important steps forward in terms of holding governments accountable to protect children, their ratification is only a small part of a much larger process of addressing the global escalation of the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

In the past five years, considerable progress has been made in implementing protective regulations related to several aspects of commercial sexual exploitation of children. At least 32 countries, for example, have introduced extraterritorial laws that support prosecution of their citizens who commit child sex crimes abroad. The World Tourism Organization has created a global Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.

Some countries have increased the legal age to participate in pornography to coincide with the age of majority rather than the (often lower) age of consent. And in some settings hotlines have been established to report Internet websites promoting child pornography.<sup>52</sup>

Despite these gains, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography observed in his 2003 report that many national laws do not adequately criminalise

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offences against children.<sup>53</sup> Even in the growing number of countries that have legislated against child sexual exploitation, challenges remain in its implementation. There is “an alarming lack” of training for law-enforcement officers and members of the judiciary, and child victims may not have access to legal support.<sup>54</sup> Where legal processes are initiated, there may be extended delays and unreliable outcomes, further victimising the children involved. This “process of revictimization of children and adolescents who seek remedial action,” according to the Special Rapporteur, “nourishes the vicious cycle of impunity.”<sup>55</sup>

One case involving an Australian diplomat who allegedly sexually exploited two Cambodian street children, for example, took two years to bring to court in Australia. In accordance with Australian extraterritorial law, the children were brought to Australia to give evidence. During their aggressive cross-examination, they were unclear as to how the process worked and gave confusing answers. As a result, the judge dismissed the case, acquitting the defendant. The children

were sent back to Cambodia, where their futures remain uncertain. One of the children currently travels to and from the border with Thailand, presumably to work as a prostitute.<sup>56</sup>

In many other instances, sexually exploited children are either ignored or treated as criminal delinquents. They bear the myriad physical and psychological wounds associated with their exploitation — rape, physical assault, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy and multiple additional reproductive-health problems, social stigmatisation, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse, depression and suicidality, to name only a few.<sup>57</sup> Their recovery depends not only on the implementation of effective and protective laws, but also on the ability of organizations to find and support them.

In an effort to document best practices, the organization End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Exploitation International (ECPAT) committed itself at the Stockholm Congress to develop a database of country-specific information on national plans to combat the sexual exploitation of children. Its summaries of regional, national and community-based prevention and response programming include, among others, descriptions of advocacy initiatives in Honduras, law-enforcement strategies in Cambodia and peer-education programmes in China. These case studies are an inspiration for future initiatives — so that current generations will receive help rather than recrimination, and fewer children will suffer the experiences of Rachel, Sarah, Saida, Thea, Mary and millions like them. ■

Young girls and boys in a police cage in Manila's red-light district after being picked up off the streets in the early hours of the morning. Some of them were selling chewing gum or cigarettes; others were likely working as underage prostitutes. The children can be released after posting bail or paying a small fine. Observers in the Philippines report that for \$10, the police on duty will "bail out" individual children for paedophiles, who take them to hotels and sexually abuse them.

Image: Peter Marlow/Magnum

When "Mary", a 14-year-old Kenyan girl was very young — she cannot remember her age at the time — her father claimed that she was not his biological daughter and tried to kill her. Running away from her house with no clothes on, she was taken in by "Jane", an adolescent, who bathed, clothed and fed her. Jane worked nights as a child prostitute, and Mary soon joined her. One night, Jane brought Mary to a man's house. Mary, who was high on alcohol and marijuana, doesn't remember much of what happened, only that she was raped repeatedly and then locked in a room. For three days, her hands and legs were tied together and she was raped into submission. Mary's rapist then became her pimp: He sent her out onto the streets at night and forced her to hand over her earnings each morning.

"I was so unhappy, but I had no choice. I wanted to escape. One day when I tried to escape, he caught me and put a knife to my throat. I screamed so loud. A neighbour heard me and came to the house. She took the knife away but didn't help me any further."

A group of child prostitutes who had heard about Mary's troubles informed the police, who arrested her pimp and required him to undergo a medical examination, which confirmed gonorrhoea. Mary, who stayed at the police station for two days and also had a check-up, had contracted gonorrhoea as well. Police contacted the local nongovernmental organization End Child Prostitution in Kenya to help Mary. The agency, which had no funds for a shelter, referred Mary to a rescue centre in Nairobi, several hours away from where she was living. The facility, run by the Irish humanitarian agency GOAL, provides children with basic literacy training and medical support.

"I was so unhappy with my life, but had no possible escape. On the streets I had to keep all of my feelings inside — there was no one to talk to. At last I am okay. I feel so lucky to have been brought here. I still have terrible nightmares about that man when I sleep. If someone talks to me about that time in my life, I go blank and feel dizzy. I cannot think straight. I have never had an education, but I am being given a chance here to learn to read and write. I can't think so far into the future at the moment. I am just so grateful for the help I have been given since my rescue.

"There are so many girls where I come from who have been raped and are living a life like I did. If anyone wants to help, we desperately need a shelter for those children to escape to — a shelter that can offer vocational training, and give them a chance for a better life."

Image: Georgina Cranston/IRIN



“Roxanna” takes a rest while waiting for clients alongside a main road in Managua, Nicaragua. She is 15 years old and walks the streets at night with other teenagers who also work as prostitutes to help their families. Roxanna, like many of them, had been sexually abused when she was younger: “I was raped when I was 13 by two guys. It was seven in the evening, and I was on my way home from the market. I had to stay at home for a month after the rape. We needed money — we were so in debt that I decided to go to the streets.” Roxanna’s father left the family when she was nine, and her mother is 60 years old and diabetic. “She has ulcers on her legs and can’t walk,” Roxanna said. “Two months after I started working she asked me how I earned the money. I told her — she agreed there was no alternative. Now I go out every night.”

