

The worst from of child labor: Commercial sex in Sri Lanka

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This study is one of several studies undertaken within the specific framework of the International Labour Organization's commitment to the elimination of the 'worst forms of child labour'. It entailed to find out reasons for and factors affecting the commercial sexual exploitation of children, to sensitize the respective authorities about the criminality of this issue and to test and evaluate the Rapid Assessment methodology in terms of its appropriateness when studying sexual exploitation as a hidden social phenomenon.

The study focused on children under 18 years of age who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The total sample was comprised of 120 children, 78 males and 42 females from eight districts. Social and economic poverty are the main factors for children to involve in commercial sex. However, children were subjected to sexual exploitation through the negligence and ignorance of parents of the involvement of their children in sex related activities. The impact of environmental factors on commercial sex is clearly evident in coastal location where children are lured in to sex related activities by tourism by those areas.

A factor that contributes towards pulling children into commercial sex is the existing demand in society for sex with children. Female children were victims of commercial sex at a younger age than male children, and they belonged to the "very poor" category of children, which suggests the influence of economic reasons as a strong push factor. Children in commercial sex hardly enter the rehabilitation process as a result of the hidden nature of the issue and the treatment they receive appears to be inadequate. Educating parents, vocational training for victimized children, improved counseling services and mobilizing the support of NGO's are some measures identified by this study to combat the problem of sexual exploitation of children.

Key words: Commercial sexual exploitation; Child labor; Criminality; Social and economic poverty