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The assessment of commercial sexual exploitation of children: a review of methodologies.

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As part of broader efforts toward durable solutions to child labor, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Bank initiated the interagency Understanding Children's Work (UCW) project in December 2000. The project is guided by the Oslo Agenda for Action, which laid out the priorities for the international community in the fight against child labor. Through a variety of data collection, research, and assessment activities, the UCW project is broadly directed toward improving understanding of child labor, its causes and effects, how it can be measured, and effective policies for addressing it. For further information, see the project website at www.ucw-project.org.

This paper is part of the research carried out within UCW (Understanding Children's Work), a joint ILO, World Bank and UNICEF project. The views expressed here are those of the authors' and should not be attributed to the ILO, the World Bank, UNICEF or any of these agencies' member countries.

The assessment of commercial sexual exploitation of children: a review of methodologies.

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ABSTRACT

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of children and youth (CSEC) is a global phenomenon of growing proportion. The invisibility and defencelessness of the victims, as well as the lack of public debate and responses from the various States to commercial and non-commercial sexual exploitation of children, are some of the most serious features of this present form of exploitation. To combat and prevent CSEC, the nature, extension and causes of this phenomenon must be identified. Besides, the mixture of social, political and economic factors that make children more vulnerable to CSE must be understood as well as the motivation of adults to have sexual relations with children. The illegal, hidden or invisible property of CSEC makes it extremely difficult to gather reliable data on this phenomenon. Hence, following the literature a total absence of econometric work is confirmed. To overcome the lack of qualitative and quantitative information on the commercial sexual exploitation of children new research approach and non-traditional research methods must be elaborated and applied. The aim of this paper is to review all existing attempts to assess and quantify commercial sexual exploitation of children.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSES) is a global phenomenon of growing proportion. It exists, with different intensity and characteristics, in many countries and therefore is of rising concern all over the world. The invisibility and defencelessness of the victims, as well as the lack of public debate and responses from the various States to commercial and non-commercial sexual exploitation of children, are some of the most serious features of this present form of abuse.

2. The Convention on the Rights of the Child¹ defines a "child" as anyone below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. Commercial sexual exploitation of children is the use of a child for sexual purposes in exchange for cash or in-kind favours between the child her or himself, the customer, intermediary or agent and others who profit from the trade in children for these purposes. The following definition of CSEC is given by Article 2 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography²:

(a) Sale of children means any act or transaction whereby a child is transferred by any person or group of persons to another for remuneration or any other consideration;

(b) Child prostitution means the use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration;

(c) Child pornography means any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes.

3. To combat and prevent Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, the nature, extension and causes of this phenomenon must be identified. Besides, the mixture of social, political and economic factors that make children more vulnerable to CSE must be understood as well as the motivation of adults to have sexual relations with children. The illegal, hidden or invisible property of CSEC makes it extremely difficult to gather reliable data on this phenomenon. Hence, following the literature a total absence of econometric work is confirmed. To overcome the lack of qualitative and quantitative information on the commercial sexual exploitation of children a new research approach and non-traditional research methods must be elaborated and applied. The aim of this paper is to review all existing attempts to assess and quantify commercial sexual exploitation of children.

4. The report proceeds as follows. Section II gives a chronological analysis of international and national action undertaken against CSEC. Section III presents how to measure and monitor children at risk to be sexually exploited, including a literature review. Section IV concludes. Section V lists reference and CSEC related web-sites.

¹ The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted and opened for signature, ratified by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 44/25 of 20. November 1989. Entry into force on September 2, 1990.

² The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography has been adopted and opened for signature, ratified by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/54/263 of 25 May 2000. Entry into force on January 18, 2002.

2. ACTION AGAINST COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

5. The first sign that Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents is being recognised as a flagrant violation of their human rights, is the almost universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child³, passed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and entered into force on 2. September 1990. Article 34 of the Convention calls for obligation of the State Parties to protect children against all kinds of sexual exploitation and abuse and to take all necessary measures to prevent their sexual exploitation. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

- (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
- (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
- (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

6. A second response emerged, with the intention of going from principle towards implementation. This was the First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children⁴ hosted by the Government of Sweden in cooperation with UNICEF, the campaigning organisation ECPAT⁵, and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The focus of the Congress was on three elements of the commercial sexual exploitation of children:

- child prostitution,
- the trafficking and sale of children for sexual purposes,
- and child pornography.

7. Its primary purpose was to create awareness and to draw international attention to the problems of commercial sexual exploitation of children and to promote the development of national plans to combat all forms of such abuse in the specific contexts in which they occur. The Congress brought together 122 governments with hundreds non-governmental organisations (NGOs), inter-governmental agencies (IGOs), researchers and academics, law enforcement sectors and young people. A Declaration and Agenda for Action that compliment the Convention on the Rights of the child was adopted by all participating governments committing themselves to a 'global partnership' against the challenge of commercial sexual exploitation of children. The two major commitments from the Stockholm Agenda for Action were first to adopt national agendas for action and indicators of progress; and second to establish focal points at the national/local levels with data bases on CSEC, by the year 2000.

8. According to several reports released during the First World Congress more and more children all over the world are being lured into the sex trade annually and in general local demand and sex tourism are keeping the demand for adolescents high. In the years that followed the Congress, a substantial increase in activities and interventions designed to counter a greater incidence of abuse, and its negative impact

³ For more detailed information visit the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Committee on the Rights of the Child): <http://www.unhchr.ch>

⁴ Stockholm, August 1996.

⁵ End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes Organisation (ECPAT): <http://www.ecpat.net>

on children and young people was observed. The knowledge base on CSEC was increased substantially, new networks of sharing and cooperation have been put in place and developed. The international framework has been enhanced by the rise of the following new treaties, reinforcing protection of the rights of the child:

- the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography⁶;
- the International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s Convention no.182⁷, concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including child prostitution and child pornography, complimented by its Recommendation no.190;
- the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in persons, especially women and children⁸, supplementing the UN Convention against International Organised Crime;
- the Convention on Cybercrime⁹.

9. At the national level, there has been a variety of law reforms and new legislation, policies and programmes to protect children from sexual exploitation and to strengthen the legal framework pertaining to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

10. The international and national framework however, suffers particularly from the inadequacy of implementation of all the promises made. Further, it was and still is, almost impossible to assess the impact of such reforms, since very few countries have improved data collection methods. Accurate and consistent data on investigations and prosecutions of cases of sexual abuse, violence or exploitation against children under the age of 18 were and still are incomplete or not yet available.

11. The Stockholm Agenda for Action had called for national agendas for action by the year 2000. This has not been responded to in many parts of the world. Only 34 countries had developed National Plans of Action against CSEC and 26 more were engaged in developing such plans by November, 2001.¹⁰ However, this activity in almost every case represented an important exercise in research and review, consultation, coalition building and cooperation among sectors of government, IGOs, NGOs and, in some countries, private sector and youth groups.

12. In 2001, the Government of Japan hosted the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children¹¹ as part of a follow-up process to review developments since the First World Congress. Delegates from 136 States took part, together with 135 Japanese NGOs, 148 NGOs from other regions and 23 IGOs and other participants, including children, young persons, and members of civil society¹². During this working Congress, the focus was on bringing information up to

⁶For detailed information visit the following website: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/treaties/opsc.htm>

⁷ ILO/IPEC homepage: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/index.htm>

⁸ Text of the Protocol may be found at <http://www.un.org/>

⁹ The Convention was signed on 23 November 2001, at the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest, by 26 Council of Europe member States and the four non-member States which had helped with the drafting (Canada, Japan, South Africa and the United States) and is open for signature. For more information and full text <http://conventions.coe.int/Default.asp>

¹⁰ Figures from ECPAT International's 2001 monitoring report (publication date November 2001)

¹¹ Yokohama, from 17 to 20 December 2001

¹² List of participating countries to the Second World Congress against CSEC may be found on the ECPAT homepage: <http://www.ecpat.net>

date, sharing and building on experiences since Stockholm, moving forward with improved understanding, elaborating more and better ideas for action, new partnerships and even stronger commitment. The Yokohoma Congress concluded with a Yokohoma Global Commitment, both reaffirming and reinforcing promises made at the First World Congress.

3. MEASURING AND MONITORING THE COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

3.1 The nature of CSEC

13. Commercial Sexual Exploitation of children is a global phenomenon afflicting both developed and developing countries although the extent of the problem varies per country and per region. Several organisations working with children considered particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, failed for a long time to recognise that some at least of their target children were victims of CSEC, or that they were at risk of being victims. This highlights again the importance of gaining a more realistic insight of the children at risk in order to combat and prevent them from being sexually exploited.

14. The nature of CSEC is multifarious. Children get caught up in commercial sexual exploitation through a series of inter-linked factors and events. There is no such single determining factor but various causes responsible for the increase of vulnerability and children's risk of being exploited that must be acknowledged in order to have an appropriate and effective response to this problem. The root causes behind the phenomenon include:

- Poverty: is the most frequent trigger factor cited as it puts children seriously at risk, but should not be seen as a pretext for justifying the sexual exploitation of children. There are many poor countries where CSEC is not a major issue and in contrast in several developing and even developed countries CSEC is rampant.
- Inequality, social exclusion and discrimination: discriminatory attitudes based on gender, caste, ethnicity or national origin may give the children a low social status and therefore make them more vulnerable.
- Illiteracy: vulnerable children usually drop out of school at a very early age. It is important to educate them and to raise awareness among groups and individuals who have impact on the lives of children.
- Negative traditional practices
- Lack of protection from family members and institutional environment
- Intra-family violence, sexual abuse and low self esteem: Studies¹³ show that the majority of children involved in CSE suffered from psychological or physical abuse within their families and most of them have been victims of some type of sexual aggression by a family member or a close acquaintance in the past.

¹³ ECPAT: <http://www.ecpat.net>

- Drug and alcohol abuse: often used because of the children's poor self esteem or as a way to cope with the circumstances of their lives (vicious circle).
- Lack of public policies that go beyond short term government plans, which provide ongoing support to fight against CSEC, and the lack of policies that incorporate preventive, corrective, educational, punitive, recovery and reinsertion measures.
- Armed conflict and criminality
- The demand side and the issue of HIV/AIDS
- Trafficking and mobility of children

3.2 How many children are subjected to CSE?

15. One of the persisting questions concerning commercial sexual exploitation of children is: How many are subjected to this phenomenon? Has CSEC increased or decreased in the past years?

16. Up to date formal database on children involved in commercial sexual exploitation either is incomplete or does not exist in almost any country where this phenomenon persists due to the invisible, hidden and illegal property of this worst form of child labour¹⁴.

17. The urgent need for more extensive and detailed research on the root causes of CSEC calls for better and more consistent data collection and further research to evaluate the impact of specific measures. National statistics of the population and labour force do not usually capture CSEC and are therefore not appropriate for quantifying this phenomenon. It is important to elaborate a new research approach and to use non-traditional research methods that make it possible to obtain a systematic analysis of the phenomenon and to overcome the lack of quantitative information on commercial sexual exploitation of children.

18. Efforts have been made to undertake more situational analyses, to generate better and more consistent and comparable data, in various regions¹⁵. However, there still continues to be poor quality reporting, which simply repeats statistics, the origin and details of which are at best uncertain.

19. Several non-traditional research methods have been elaborated and applied in order to improve the knowledge of CSEC. One approach to assess Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children is to extract a certain type and number of establishments where child sex workers are located and conduct an in-depth study trying to rescale the sample estimate to national level. A further possibility to obtain a systematic analysis of the phenomenon is to undertake action related research. In this case the risk profile of children needs to be analysed in order to understand the target of preventive measures. An example of action based research is given by the study case of Calcutta described in 3.4.

¹⁴ Definition of Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL) is given by ILO Convention No. 182 as well as by the accompanying Recommendation No.190; more info and full text on ILO/IPEC Homepage: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/index.htm>

¹⁵ The Protection Project, 2001 (IOM, ILO, UNICEF, ECPAT, ESCAP).

3.3 Literature review on CSEC

20. The empirical literature on the commercial sexual exploitation of children is vast. However it is indispensable to evaluate the usefulness of existing studies as often poor quality is being reported with absence of proper research techniques or theoretical understanding. This effort is given with the literature review and annotated bibliography 'How can we measure and monitor the commercial sexual exploitation of children?' (1996, Ennew J. et al.). It has been prepared¹⁶ on the request of UNICEF for the First Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. The objectives of this research were to map CSEC showing the main ideas in operation and the main organisational and geographical contexts in which they arise; map the data showing what data is available, their strengths and weaknesses, together with a critique of methods and assumption; describe the context of the production and reproduction of knowledge of the phenomenon; discuss the implications of the existing discourses and data and their potential for future work (particularly in the area of measurement). The authors document a huge amount of empirical literature on CSEC. The poor quality of research, poor data, inadequate analysis and low level theories is believed to be a common aspect of the literature. To avoid the reproduction of unreliable or mythological information within the literature it was considered useful to list the following more common errors of research method and analysis:

- Lack of defining the subject in terms of the age group of children
- Lack of background in the social science and therefore research becomes a 'fact finding'
- Lack of control groups when designing research
- Small samples and the information gets frequently stretched extremely thin by being subjected to inappropriate quantitative analysis.
- Generalising results of research with small-scale samples to represent large populations
- Dividing research from local and cultural contexts
- Relying on single-method studies without cross-checking by using other methods or by comparison with other studies and secondary data
- The questionnaire survey used alone is a poor method and a bad tool used with children and particularly sensitive subjects (as CSEC)
- Data may become biased when researchers gain access to research subject by means of institutions, projects or programmes. Information may reflect what the children and others think the project would like them to say.

21. A further effort to identify empirical studies that report national and international prevalence data concerning CSE was part of the groundwork for the three nation project (2001, Estes R.J) described in 3.6. The working guide to the empirical literature of the Sexual Exploitation of Children includes references published since 1990 and is divided in six parts: Child Rights; Children at Risk; Child Sexual Exploitation (including CSEC); Laws, the Legal Environment and Legal Resources; International Cooperation in Prosecuting Adults Committing Sexual Crimes against Children; Use of the Internet in Sexual Crimes involving Children.

¹⁶ Collaboration between UNICEF NY – Children in especially difficult circumstances section, Centre for Family Research, University of Cambridge and Childwatch International.

3.4 The rapid assessment methodology

22. The first step in the direction of quantifying commercial sexual exploitation of children is given with the ILO-UNICEF Rapid Assessment methodology (RA)¹⁷ conducted, up to date, in the following countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Jamaica, Madagascar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Vietnam¹⁸.

23. The methodology of Rapid Assessment has been adopted in order to assist the countries in obtaining information on more hidden or even invisible forms of child labour and further on child workers in the most dangerous or unhealthy types of activities.

24. Collecting exhaustive and complete data on the worst form of child labour is more than difficult and as already underlined in some cases not feasible. This methodology makes it possible to achieve an understanding of a specific social reality or situation in a particular sociocultural context in order to be able to combat, resolve or prevent children from being involved in certain activities. Rapid Assessment tries to make the invisible problem visible. It intends to provide relevant information in a short period of time and at low cost that may be used as a tool for in-depth research. The following data collection strategies are applied:

- All existing information including published/unpublished literature
- Consultation with knowledgeable individuals and organisations familiar with the phenomenon in the particular area and discussions with key informants
- Mapping of the area under investigation for obtaining visual information on work activities and work conditions.
- Accurate and systematic observation of the children under analysis.
- Individual and group interviews or guided conversation (see comments on ethical considerations)
- Short questionnaires

25. Rapid Assessment focuses on areas that are known to have substantial concentrations of children involved in activities hard to identify and quantify through structured sample surveys and areas where no special projects have so far been initiated. Therefore, its scope and findings are limited and primarily qualitative. However, often, it is the only information source available for children engaged in the worst form of child labour. Some quantitative data may be obtained but it needs to be stressed that usually it is not representative of a larger population of working children and therefore the conclusions reached are hard to generalise. In addition, statistical inferences and comparisons are not possible and as a consequence its use for policymaking is limited. Although this methodology has several limitations, the qualitative information provided is necessary to outline the social, economic and cultural dynamics that led the children into the worst forms of child labour. The findings are very useful in planning and starting programmes and projects at local or community level to help working children.¹⁹

¹⁷ launched in 2000. Descriptions concerning RA approach are based on / are summaries / or direct extracts of selected sections from '*Investigating child labour – Guidelines for a RA*'.

¹⁸ Full text of Rapid Assessment on commercial sexual exploitation of children in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Jamaica, Madagascar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Vietnam is available on ILO/IPEC homepage.

¹⁹ More information on the, up to date, 38 conducted Rapid Assessment studies can be found on the ILO/IPEC Website.

3.5 Action based research

26. Following the literature on the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children, a total absence of econometric work is confirmed. The primary reason for this has been repeated several times and is due to the extreme difficulty in gathering reliable data on sex workers since this activity is practised either illegally or, as in the study case of Calcutta (Rao V., et al. 2001), on the fringes of legality. This study underlines once again the difficulty of conducting qualitative and especially quantitative analysis of the phenomenon CSEC. However, a better understanding of the methodology applied to assess CSE is given.

27. The major issue of the analysis undertaken in Calcutta by Indrani Gupta et al (2001) consists in understanding how sex workers can be protected from HIV-AIDS and therefore estimates the compensating differential for condom use. The study concentrates on the growing issue of HIV-AIDS in India. About 7 million adults - 7 out of 1,000 – are infected in the country which is more than double compared with South Africa²⁰. The group at high risk was identified to be commercial sex workers. In India the awareness about HIV-AIDS and safe sex practices is very low. Consequently several HIV-AIDS interventions in India have been targeted at the commercial sex industry. The method used for preventing the spread of this disease was to promote the use of condoms and other safe sex practices. The inherent preference against condoms makes all interventions difficult and sex workers who want to practice safe sex must face loss of money by doing so.

28. The study analyses the incentives faced by sex workers and focuses on estimating the compensating differential for condom use. For an effective anti-HIV strategy among sex workers it is important to underline that the compensating differential for safe sex arises because clients are unwilling to use condoms. In order to reduce the compensating differential, sex workers must reduce competition and impose sanctions against selling sex without a condom. This increase in sanctions would directly increase the incentives to use condoms and reduce the compensating differential for condom use by reducing the availability of condom-free sex. Further, it may reduce overall demand for sex work.

29. The data set used for this study was a random sample of 608 commercial sex workers from the red-light area of Sonagachi in Calcutta surveyed in 1993. The survey was conducted by a team of social workers under the supervision of the local hygiene and public health institute (AIH&PH). This institute had been established in 1992 as an intervention programme. It brought sex workers in contact with peer educators who provided them with medical care, AIDS and safe sex practices instruction and was administered in a non-systematic manner. By the time the survey was conducted 53% of the sex workers had been already in contact with these educators and an excellent rapport of trust had been established. The market of sex workers in Sonagachi is a quiet competitive one, counting 4,000 sex workers in 370 brothels receiving 20,000 clients a day²¹.

30. The way of approaching them was conducted in the following systematic way. All brothels of this area were targeted starting at one end with one set of brothels and moving on to another set the next day. The same strategy was used for the survey carried out in 1993. All brothels were listed including their size. Further, a random sample of brothels was chosen and in each sampled brothel a random sample of sex workers was identified²². The estimation showed a highly heterogeneous group of sex

²⁰ South Africa counts 3.7 infections.

²¹ Figures from the local Hygiene and Public Health Institute (AIH&PH), 1997.

²² The sample per brothel was determined by its size

workers with wide variations in their wage, which was also reflected in the sex workers characteristics. Their average age was 23 with a range from 14 – 50 years and an average age when entering the profession of 19 years. 21 % of them had some schooling, with 18 % having completed middle school, and 5 % with a high school education or above. 19 % had been married before they had entered the brothels which underlined that the major reasons for being sex workers was abandonment by their husbands and widowhood. Other characteristics were not identified.

3.6 The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the U.S., Canada and Mexico

31. In January 1999 a two year study on the nature and extent of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) was started and carried out in three countries of the NAFTA²³, i.e., United States, Canada and Mexico. The reason for selecting these countries is multiple: their geographic proximity to one another; co-equal partners in the free trade agreement; comparative ease with which nationals of these countries move across each other's borders; known existence of CSE in all three countries; trans-national and intra-regional nature of the CSEC within and between all three countries; existence of formal commitments on the part of each government to work toward the elimination of the CSEC.

32. The three-nation project involved a unique partnership between leading governmental and nongovernmental organisations located in the U.S., Canada and Mexico; three universities²⁴, two international child advocacy organisations²⁵, the leading national child welfare organisations in the U.S and Mexico²⁶, a major professional association²⁷ and financial participation from the federal government²⁸, private foundations²⁹ and the Universities of Pennsylvania and of Montreal.

33. The project's major objectives focus on tracing the diverse patterns and trends in the commercial sexual exploitation of children; producing more reliable estimates of the extent of the CSEC in each of the countries and to document the international, regional, national and sub-national legal traditions that bear upon the CSEC in its many variations³⁰. Given the methodological difficulties posed by the nature of commercial sexual exploitation of children, a combination of available methodologies enabled to get a first insight of the phenomenon. Based on this groundwork it was possible to undertake in a total of 27 selected cities³¹ more detailed analysis in national studies (Azaola, 2001; Dionne, 2001; Estes & Weiner, 2002).

34. Multiple samples were drawn from national and sub-national units, some of which comprised traditional random samples and others of which comprised convenience and purposive samples. Importance was given to the 'snow ball samples

²³ North American Free Trade Agreement

²⁴ The University of Pennsylvania – Philadelphia; the University of Montreal – Montreal; the Centre for Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology – Mexico City.

²⁵ The International Bureau for Children's Rights – Montreal; Casa Alianza – Costa Rica

²⁶ The Child Welfare League of America and the Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF)

²⁷ The National Association of Social Workers

²⁸ The U.S Department of Justice – National Institute of Justice

²⁹ The W.T. Grant Foundation and the Fund for Non-violence

³⁰ prostitution, pornography, trafficking and sex tourism

³¹ Canada: 4 cities; U.S: 17 cities; Mexico: 6 cities

in which child sex workers, traffickers, customers, law enforcement officials and others identified additional persons and organisations who were then interviewed. Multiple levels of information were collected that was compiled and examined in both individual and aggregate formats. Multiple methods were used to investigate critical relationships (both qualitative and quantitative nature) that exist between conceptual level, type of sample and the level of measurement used. The project was implemented in the following phases:

- i. recruitment, selection and hiring of staff;
- ii. reviews of relevant criminal justice and human service literature;
- iii. establishing linkages with key GO and NGO agencies and organisations serving sexually exploited children;
- iv. appointment of national and regional CSE experts to an International Advisory Group;
- v. interviews with key decision makers in law enforcement and the human services;
- vi. implementation of city focus group meetings in 28 North American cities;
- vii. statistical surveys of local, state and national GOs and NGOs serving sexually exploited children;
- viii. interviews with sexually exploited children;
- ix. interviews with traffickers in children for sexual purposes (Mexico);
- x. interviews with adult ‘customers’ of children for sex (Canada);
- xi. reviews of local, state, and federal statutes pertaining to CSE and the CSEC;
- xii. reviews of international agreements, declarations and covenants pertaining to CSE and CSEC;
- xiii. meetings with law enforcement and human service professionals to frame recommendations for strengthening the national capacity to prevent and protect children from CSE.

35. The combination of field research, i.e. interviews, focus group meetings, conferences etc, and statistical surveys allowed for collecting the bulk of the data in the three countries. The study obtained useful first generation data on the subject and put to the test tools designed for a better understanding of the complex aspects and dynamics of CSEC. In Mexico it was possible to achieve global estimates by adding the categories of children for which reliable data was available to others for which proposed approximations taking into account the number of establishments detected and the number of children that work in each of them on average according to testimonies that, as far as possible, was crossed or corroborated. The estimate of the number of children at risk to being subjected to CSE in Mexico falls on 16.000 in the year 2000. In the United States of America a number of 244.000 – 325.000 children and youth were estimated to be vulnerable and at risk each year of becoming victims of sexual exploitation³². The results of this research project were compared with other studies undertaken in the same regions of the three countries.

4. CONCLUSIONS

36. Sexual exploitation of children for commercial purpose is a growing global issue and is considered as one of the worst problems affecting children.

³² including CSEC (child pornography, juvenile prostitution, trafficking in children for sexual purposes)

37. First international action to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children focused on global awareness rising. It is essential to gain a realistic insight of children particularly vulnerable and at risk to becoming victims of CSE. A very detailed knowledge of their working and life circumstances is necessary to elaborate helpful strategies fighting this growing phenomenon. A series of inter-linked factors and events have been identified as the root causes for children being more vulnerable. These trigger factors include poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, lack of protection from family members and institutional environment, intra-family violence and sexual abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, trafficking and mobility of children, armed conflict and criminality, negative traditional practices, underlined by the lack of public policies providing ongoing support to fight against CSEC.

38. Up to date formal database on children involved in commercial sexual exploitation is either incomplete or not available due to the invisible, hidden and illegal property of this worst form of child labour. National statistics of the population and labour force usually do not capture CSEC. Therefore, new research methodologies and non traditional research methods are required to obtain qualitative and quantitative data. The first step is given with the ILO-UNICEF Rapid Assessment Methodology (RA) based on structured sample surveys. A further possibility to obtain a systematic analysis of the phenomenon is to undertake action related research based on targeted preventive measures. Econometric work on CSEC is almost non-existing. On the other hand the empirical literature on this issue is vast. However, there still continues to be reported poor quality, simply repeating statistics without indicating more details or its origin.

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- DCI, Defence for Children International, is an independent non-governmental organisation set up during the International Year of the Child (1979) to ensure on-going, practical, systematic and concerted international action specially directed towards promoting and protecting the rights of the child. <http://www.defence-for-children.org/>
- DIF, Desarrollo Integral de la Familia - National System for Integral Family, <http://www.dif.gob.mx>
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- ECPAT, International 'Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes Organisation' is a network of organisations and individuals working together for the elimination of child prostitution, child pornography and trafficking of children for sexual purposes. It seeks to encourage the world community to ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights free from all forms of commercial sexual exploitation. <http://www.ecpat.com/eng/index.asp>

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