

**Poverty, Globalization, Social Customs
&
South Asian Children in Prostitution**

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INTRODUCTION

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) is a human, social and national challenge of the highest priority for any country. Considering the importance of this issue, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) calls for State Parties to take all appropriate measures to prevent the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in unlawful sexual activity, as well as to prevent the exploitative use of children in prostitution, pornography or other unlawful sexual acts, Article 34. And the article 35 calls for State Parties to take all appropriate measures to prevent the abduction, sale of or trafficking of children for any purpose or in any form.

The Declaration of the Agenda for Action of the World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (1996) provided the following definition of the (ECPAT, 2001-02):

“The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) is a fundamental violation of children’s rights. It comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated as a sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and contemporary form of slavery.”

International Labour Organization (ILO) declared the CSEC as one of the worst forms of child labour under the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182, and the convention demands the ratifying States to design and implement action plans to eliminate the worst forms of child labour as a priority.

Prostitution is one of the fastest growing components of today’s world economy. Some NGOs and international agencies like to call victims of prostitution ‘sex workers’ and refer to the ‘sex industry’ as if prostitution were just another job, like working at any other place, but in fact most of the women are youths and children and little more than modern slaves. Workers create commodities, but like old-fashioned slaves these women are commodities to be bought and sold as if they were things, and not human beings. Many hundreds of thousands of women and young girls are trafficked every year from the world’s poorest areas to Western Europe, Australia, Israel, Japan, U.S.A., Arab Gulf and other countries. This contemporary slave trade generates billions of dollars every year (A World to Win News Service, 2005).

There are mainly five types of CSEC, including child prostitution, child sex tourism, early marriage, child pornography and trafficking in children (ECPAT, 2004):

- 1) Child Prostitution:** The use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration, as stated by Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 2) Child Sex Tourism:** The commercial sexual exploitation of children by persons who travel from their own country to another usually less developed country to engage in sexual acts with children.
- 3) Early Marriage:** The marriage of the children and adolescents below the age of 18 years. There are some common examples of early age marriage, such as: forced marriages, temporary marriage, false marriage and marriage with the Hindu deity.

4) Child Pornography: 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, as stated by Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

5) Trafficking in Children: Trafficking consists of all acts involved in the recruitment or transportation of persons within or across borders, involving deception, coercion or force, debt bondage or fraud, for the purpose of placing persons in situations of abuse or exploitation, such as forced prostitution, slavery-like practices, battering or extreme cruelty, sweatshop labour or exploitative domestic services.

SITUATION IN SOUTH ASIA

The countries making up the South Asia region support about one-quarter of the planet's population, with a large number of people unemployed and living below the poverty line. This socio-economic situation has helped increase social crimes, especially human trafficking of women and children. Prostitution, which is also included in human trafficking, is an intolerant social reality and a major issue in South Asia (Naqvi, 2005).

Each year more than one million children worldwide are reportedly forced into child prostitution, trafficking and sold for sexual purposes or used in child pornography. The children in the commercial sex industry are living like slaves and have no means to come out of this vicious cycle.

The ratio of human trafficking is high in this region, with girls kidnapped from Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives and trafficked to mostly Gulf States, where there is a bevy of rich clientele (Naqvi, 2005).

Child sexual exploitation is a crime, which is affecting the whole world. It is prevailing in both the developed and the developing countries. Unfortunately, South Asia is the only place where the commercial sexual exploitation of the children exists in all of its forms.

India has more than 100,000 child prostitutes in the only six metropolitan cities: Mumbai, Calcutta, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad and Bangalore. These are one third of a total of 300,000 child prostitutes in the country according to the statistics presented in the Stockholm Conference, 1996 (ECPAT, 2005).

With an untested estimate of 270,000 child prostitutes, the problem of child prostitution in India is widespread and quite visible. The form however varies in the different regions of India. In the major commercial centers of Mumbai (Bombay), Chennai (Madras), and Delhi, many child prostitutes are trafficked into the country from neighbouring Nepal and Bangladesh. Indigenous tribal women and children are trafficked to these centers and forced into sexual exploitation. In the beaches of Goa, there are significant accounts of sex tourism (Ibid, 2005).

The trafficking of children for sexual purposes is an immense problem in most South Asian countries and India is the regional hub. Bangladesh and Nepal are the dominant source countries into India. Estimates vary, but a safe guess is that several thousand

Bangladeshi girls and five to seven thousand Nepalese girls are trafficked out of the country and primarily to India each year.

Some studies estimate that more than 6,000 girls are being sold to India each year, which adds to the huge number of 172,000 girls, mostly from Nepal, working as prostitutes in India (Naqvi, 2005). According to a report (A World to Win News Service, 2005) there are 400,000 to 500,000 child prostitutes in India. Many are trafficked from Nepal and Bangladesh.

Pakistan has some of social taboos in which discussion on an issue like child sexual abuse is prohibited. Culture and traditions do not allow the exposure of such issues. But a study by ANLAAP Indian NGO said that Karachi is notorious for receiving a million Bangladeshi and more than 200,000 Burmese women (Naqvi, 2005).

In most countries the majority of victims of child prostitution are girls, the opposite is the case in Pakistan where studies have shown that the majority are boys. Pakistan is also a source, transit, and destination country for an increasing number of trafficked children.

Dr. Tufail Mohammad Khan (2000) states the following with respect to CSEC in Pakistan:

Considering that we are a society that preaches and revolves around morality, we in Pakistan are surprisingly tolerant of some forms of child sexual (exploitation). Whereas social values and norms shun prostitution as an institution, male child prostitution is not only tolerated but also seen to be a status symbol in some parts of the country.

According to NGO's Coalition on Child Rights (1998) Pakistan is distinguished for having a high proportion of boys and young male victims of commercial sexual exploitation -perhaps a higher proportion than female victims.

Bangladesh like some of other South Asian countries is having the custom of early marriage of the young girls. This custom is so deeply rooted in the minds and attitudes of the people that it has destroyed the whole social setup. It is so difficult to end this custom because generations after generations are so strictly attached to this custom.

According to the estimates taken by the UNICEF, 51 percent girls in Bangladesh get married before the age of 18 years (ECPAT, 2005).

In the decade from 1988 to 1998, 200,000 Bangladeshi girls were sold into the sex industry in nations including Pakistan, India and Middle East (Ibid, 2005).

Trafficking is a serious problem in Bangladesh. According to the Centre for Human and Children Studies, 200,000 women and girls were smuggled into Pakistan from Bangladesh over the past decade. UNICEF and SAARC estimate that 4,500 children are trafficked from Bangladesh to Pakistan each year (Sahil, 2003).

A study from the Ministry of Home and Social Welfare provides a low estimate of 13,200 children who have been trafficked over the last five years and states that of these, 4,700 have been rescued (ECPAT, 2005). The most common destinations are India and Pakistan, however many women and children are taken to Arab countries.

Sri Lanka is having the problem of child prostitution primarily among boys, which is highly visible in beach resort areas. The first scientific study on the scale of child sexual exploitation in Sri Lanka has concluded that 100 children are sexually exploited every day on the island (Ibid, 2005).

In Sri Lanka there is increasing evidence of child abuse. About 4,000 complaints of child abuse are reported to the Child Protection Authority (NCPA) annually, giving child abuse dubious distinction of the top criminal offence committed in 2000. Close to 1,000 of these cases included physical torture, sexual abuse and trafficking (Ibid, 2005).

Child prostitution is rampant in Sri Lanka. The availability of child sex is publicized in magazines, web sites and chat rooms. According to a study there are 15,000 children engaged in the sex trade. The government itself estimates there are approximately 30,000 children involved. Sex tourism is easily seen and widely known to occur in the south and southwestern coast. Boys victimized here are known as Beach Boys. They operate in gangs or independently (Ibid, 2005).

Nepal is having the growing trade of child trafficking. Every year thousands of young women - some barely in their teens - are smuggled out of their homes in the mountains of Nepal to the plains of India. Nepali welfare agency says that there are about 200,000 Nepali girls in red light areas of Indian cities at any given time (Ibid, 2005).

It is reported that child prostitution is a growing problem in Nepal. No clear numbers exist but approximations are very high. The NGO Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) alleges that 2000 brothels exist in Nepal and a high percentage of the prostitutes working were children (Ibid, 2005).

The trafficking of children is a considerable problem. While accurate numbers are not available, it is estimated that 5000-7000 Nepalese girls are annually trafficked out of Nepal to India, and increasingly, to the Gulf States for prostitution purposes. As an illustration, it is believed that 200,000 of the prostitutes in India are Nepalese. Twenty percent are thought to be under 16 (Ibid, 2005).

In 2000, Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) recorded 240 cases of girl trafficking - 30% of them were below 16 years of age. 66 girls returned home through various means, and in 97 cases the police were able to arrest traffickers (Ibid, 2005).

REASONS

What makes children vulnerable to sexual exploitation? We can declare poverty as the catalyst for the sexual exploitation of the children. But poverty is not alone the root cause of this heinous crime.

Population Growth Rate and Poverty

South Asia is having countries with the higher annual growth rates; India and Pakistan. Therefore, it is very hard for the developing countries with the limited resources to fulfill the needs of its population, especially the children. The economic deprivation of the children and their families is the biggest cause of CSEC.

India has around 2.3 million prostitutes working in the region. Most of the girls are driven to this 'profession' due to poverty, marriage or adoption (Naqvi, 2005).

Country wise data of poverty in South Asia (2004)

Country	Population below 1US\$ per day
India	44.2%
Pakistan	31.0%
Bangladesh	29.1%
Sri Lanka	6.6%
Nepal	37.7%

Source: ECPAT (2005)

Globalization

Demand and supply, the most commonly used economic terms now in command socially. As human beings, human feelings are for sale like a trade show in the form of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

There is a network of criminals involved in the CSEC; these criminal elements provide the services in the sex market on the demand of customers, mainly men, who seeks unlawful sexual gratification with children.

There are several reasons for human degradation in the form of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, such as: demand by the adults (usually the economically well off or well to do men) to satisfy their sexual desires and the economic deprivation of the victims or poverty.

This is the reality of today's world. Two characteristics stand out in these horror stories. First of all, the process of globalization that exploded after the collapse of the Soviet bloc is one of the main reasons for the new and unprecedented rise in the trafficking of women and children. Unemployment, poverty, a ruined economy, and a torn social fabric are part of the real outcome of an ever more market-driven global economy, especially for people in the third world. In this distorted structure the poverty and misery of the majority is a rich source for the accumulation of capital in the hands of few. And among them women are first victims of this new phenomenon of capitalism. Millions of children and young women have been enslaved and robbed of their lives so that investors in the sex industry based in many developed countries can accumulate more and more capital (A World to Win News Service, 2005)

There are two equally stronger forces linked with the issue of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: poverty and demand. We are aware about the intensity of poverty but the demand is making its equal contribution to the issue.

Now there is whole industry where children are exploited for the sexual purposes and the owners of brothels are now having international links, due to which the tourists are coming to their homelands and that is also a contributing factor to the tourism in these countries. In the recent times, now the girls are going on a visit visa to places like Abu Dhabi, Dubai etc. and working on short contracts and earning a part of total amount and the real benefit is going in the hands of middle man.

Tourism Arrivals

Country	Tourism arrivals per year
India	2,400,000
Pakistan	351,000
Bangladesh	184,000
Sri Lanka	367,000
Nepal	418,000

Source: ECPAT (2005)

In eastern India, Calcutta has emerged as a hub for the trafficking of girls, who also arrive from Nepal, Bangladesh and Burma (BBC News, 2004).

India is also a significant source and transit country. Many child prostitutes in the brothels of India's major cities come from rural villages and they are trafficked under the same guise as children from Bangladesh and Nepal. Indian female children are trafficked to the Middle East and Europe, often forced into sexual slavery. This is similar for the Bangladeshi and Nepalese children who pass through India en route to the Middle East and the West.

Pakistan is a source, destination and transit country for the trafficking of children. Despite the fact that in the last five years, there have been some important steps taken to address the issue of trafficking at a regional level, through the drafting SAARC Draft Convention of Trafficking of Women and Children. The Pakistani government has taken little concrete action to stem the flow of women and children being trafficked into the country, or to help trafficking victims, because any actions taken would require regional collaboration and the acknowledgement of each South Asian countries' role in perpetrating the problem. Since India, Pakistan and Bangladesh do not enjoy relations of mutual trust, there has been little progress made on a problem that has been highlighted in the press and by activists for years.

According to the Iranian student agency Ilna, every day an average of 54 Iranian girls of 16 to 25 years old are traded in Karachi (Pakistan), mainly for re-export (A World to Win News Service, 2005).

Pakistan is a receiving country for thousands of women and children every year, mainly from Bangladesh, though there is considerable trafficking of Afghan refugee women and boys. Estimates of the number of women and children trafficked vary considerably. At minimum thousands are trafficked each year. The trafficking problem has been most

consistently addressed and publicized by a legal aid service in Karachi that helps commercially sexually exploited women and girls. These women and girls are left languishing in prisons without passports or the means to return home even once they are "freed".

The manner in which CSEC occurs varies in Sri Lanka. Often pimps (foreign or local) arrange meetings. Children are also known to offer themselves to foreigners. Families sometimes provide paedophiles with accommodation and access to children in return of money. Crimes also occur in hotels, lodges and guesthouses catering exclusively to paedophiles. There is a movement toward a brothel system (ECPAT, 2005).

The vast majority of Nepali girls are lured under the pretext of marriage or employment. They are kept in prostitution through violence, coercion or debt bondage. Previously, trafficking was believed to be limited to the Kathmandu valley. This is no longer the case. The problem of trafficking has spread to most parts of the country. Additionally, most social groups are now affected, though females from lower castes are most affected.

The main transit points are along Kakarvitta, Jogmani, Birgunj, Sunauli, Nepal Gunj, and Mahendranagar. The Special Rapporteur noted that the 1,500-km border between Nepal and India is porous, with numerous routes that can be used by the traffickers and at least 20 formal entry points. The children are coached on how to answer questions that may be asked at the border. Often the border officials are aware that a crime is being committed but will ignore it and later blackmail the agents. After crossing the border, the children are handed over to another person posing as a brother, uncle, or friend (Ibid, 2005).

The globalization of prostitution combines the inequality of nations and the inequality of the sexes in one hideous phenomenon (A World to Win News Service, 2005).

Misconceptions and Rigid Customs

There are several misconceptions regarding sex with a virgin or child. In many of the Asian countries, for example, some men believe that having sex with young girls will protect them from HIV/AIDS. Some believe it will cure AIDS. Others believe that sex with a virgin renews youthfulness, increases virility, and brings good health, longevity, luck and success in business.

Customs like early age marriage, forced marriage or temporary marriage of the child makes them vulnerable to the sexual exploitation. These customs are so rigid in themselves in some of the South Asian states.

The reason for the rigidity of people to this custom is most probably their economic deprivation or poverty. In countries like Bangladesh where this custom is frequent the females are usually not economically active or earn as much as the male household members. Therefore, the parents of the girls prefer to marry the girls as soon as possible by demanding money from the rich person.

Most trafficked persons are lured by promises of good jobs or marriage. Some are forced into debt bondage outside of the country. Parents reluctantly send children to seek employment as a desperate means to pull the family out from a state of severe poverty. Unwed mothers, orphans, and others outside of the "normal" family system are more susceptible to falling victim to prostitution. Traffickers living abroad have been reported to arrive in a village and marry a woman and sell her upon arrival in the destination country.

Much of the trafficking and smuggling of persons is conducted by criminal gangs. The border between Bangladesh and India is porous making illegal border crossings easy.

Impacts on the Prostitutes

CSEC may result in serious physical, psychological and social damages to the prostitutes especially to the younger prostitutes but the major threat to their health is HIV/AIDS. Because children are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases than adults, including HIV infection and AIDS, as their body tissues are easily damaged as compared to the adults. Children who are exploited are often not in a position to negotiate safe sex.

Statistics released by the World Health Organization from time to time show AIDS cases are rising in many parts of the world. AIDS victims are usually homosexuals and prostitutes (Mubabaya, M., 2005).

India: Though the current HIV infection rate in India is less than 1 per cent, this nation of over one billion people is likely to face a crisis similar to that of sub-Saharan Africa unless effective prevention measures are implemented quickly. It has been found that there are already an estimated 3.97 million HIV-positive people in India – more than any other country aside from South Asia (AMFAR AIDS Research, 2004).

Pakistan: HIV prevalence is only 0.1 per cent in Pakistan still the country is highly vulnerable to an AIDS epidemic. HIV transmission through injection drug use is particularly prevalent in Pakistan because of the country's extensive narcotic industry. According to UNAIDS (2002) Pakistan is having 78,000 HIV infected people (Ibid, 2004).

Bangladesh: While its national adult HIV prevalence rate is very low – less than 0.1 per cent – Bangladesh is poised for a serious outbreak of HIV. The patterns of behavior that fuel the spread of HIV infection are widespread. Bangladesh has an extensive and highly stigmatized sex industry with some of Asia's largest brothels, high rates of other sexually transmitted diseases, and a dense and very young population analogous to many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. There are currently 13,000 people living with HIV/AIDS and 2,100 AIDS orphans in the Bangladesh (Ibid, 2004).

Sri Lanka: HIV infection rates remain low, but several factors could facilitate the quick spread of the virus. Migration is common both within the country and the neighboring India, where HIV is more prevalent. According to UNAIDS (2002) Sri Lanka is having 4800 HIV infected people (Ibid, 2004).

Nepal: Although HIV prevalence in Nepal's general adult population is relatively low (0.5%), there are already concentrated epidemics within certain high-risk groups. For example, 50 per cent of injection drug users and over 36 per cent of female sex workers in major urban areas are HIV-positive. Experts warn that the Nepal's weak health system and the extensive trafficking of Nepali women and girls into the Indian sex industry put Nepal at risk for a major HIV epidemic (Ibid, 2004).

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The situation of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in South Asia is astonishing and growing poverty, globalization and social customs are among the major causes for CSEC's existence in the region. Although all of the countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC), but till now none of the effective measures have been taken by the governments and other concerning organizations to address the issue of CSEC.

It has been found that CSEC do exists in the South Asian region with its severity, therefore it is strange that Bangladesh and Maldives are the only nations in the region who has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC-OP-SC) on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and Pakistan is the only nation who has signed it.

If the policies would not focus on the exploitation of our upcoming in the form of commercial sexual exploitation then no doubt that we are crushing our future with our own hands. Therefore, there is a need to implement following recommendations:

- Government must spend more to reduce the poverty of children and their families, because children suffer the most from poverty, poverty eradication must begin with them.
- Develop and enforce laws, policies and programs to protect children from commercial sexual exploitation.
- Rehabilitation of the exploited children is necessary, therefore there is a need to develop and implement comprehensive plans to protect and assist the child victims and to facilitate their recovery and reintegration in the society.
- Create a better environment for the children through education, social mobilization and sensitization. The sensitization of the masses will help to reduce the demand for the sexual exploitation of children.
- The HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns must also emphasize on the children in prostitutes, because they are most vulnerable to the disease. In South Asia most of the HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns assume that children in prostitutes are not related to HIV/AIDS, only India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka initiated some of the programs to aware the children in prostitutes about HIV/AIDS.
- Children must be taught about the body safety through education, so that they can protect themselves from the dangers of abuse, exploitation, abduction etc.
- Also the nations having the existence of CSEC must ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC-OP-SC) on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

- Respective governments should take productive steps to eradicate the customs/traditions affecting children, like *Devadasi* in Hinduism, *Bachabaazi* in NWFP, Pakistan and *early age marriage* in Bangladesh.

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