

Child Sex Work in Sri Lanka: Causes, Consequences and Remedies

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The study on children engaging in sex tourism (CST) was conducted in 2014-2015 at five locations in Sri Lanka with the view to broaden the understanding of the causes and consequences of children engaging in sex work and to examine the applicable legal framework as well as modes of vulnerability reduction. The research comprised of a literature review, qualitative data collected through focus group discussions, informant interviews, and workshops with children and quantitative data obtained from 100 children in sex tourism from five districts, Colombo, Gampaha, Galle, Matara and Moneragala to capture diverse groups of children engaging in sex work.

24% of girls and 28% of boys had their first sexual intercourse before age 13. 12% of girls and 6% of boys have engaged in sex work before age 13. 75% of girls and 15% of boys engage in heterosexual sex. 10% of girls and 15% boys engage in homosexual sex. 15% of girls and 55% of boys indicate group or bisexual sex. 80% girls and 50% boys have local clients. 70% of girls and 54% boys have been forced to perform certain sexual acts including non-use of condoms (12% boys and 20% girls), anal sex (76% girls) and to swallow seminal fluid. Qualitative findings include analysis of underlying societal causes such as multiple dimensions of economic and social poverty.

Children who engage in sex work are directly linked to social poverty than to economic poverty. There are direct links between children in sex tourism and the age at which they are exposed to sexual activities and the environments that such children grow up in. Support services are either not available or are inaccessible. Low education of parents, under aged marriages, and alcoholism of parents push children into sex work. The expanding tourism sector has created demand for child

sex workers. Social connectivity via infrastructure development and web based connectivity are directly linked to aggravating children in sex work.

Possible remedial measurement including enhanced field presence and technical capabilities of support services and relevant stakeholders, empower parents and societies to be more responsible, develop an accessible child sex preventive service, enhance community engagement for effective prevention of child sex work and to look at holistic development of societies.

Key words: *Child, Sex workers.*