

Trafficking in Women and Children for Sexual Purposes: A Growing Threat in Europe

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This article acts as a vehicle for the dissemination of a series of sources of information regarding the trafficking of women and children for sexual purposes within Europe. It assimilates pre-existing information on international trafficking and child sexual exploitation and contextualises it within Europe. This article is meant to highlight the need for education of social professionals regarding this important issue, but also to spotlight the current gaps within the system.

Introduction

Globalisation has been credited with opening borders, creating new markets and promoting trade between countries. Many see a future world economy balanced between the forces of supply and demand, outside the boundaries of state, creating an ever-increasing market supplied by easily acquired resources. Capital and commodities, however, are only some of the resources that will be moved globally in a quick, efficient manner. Human resources will be drawn from areas of supply to areas of demand as new opportunities are created. Some of these people will move by their own free will. Others will be the victims of exploitation.

Trafficking in human beings and the sexual exploitation of children have been gaining increasing levels of public exposure. High profile organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Save the Children and UNICEF have begun to put these issues at the top of their agendas. This reaction addresses the concerns of smaller, more focused organisations such as End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking (ECPAT) and Anti-Slavery International. Increasingly, these organisations are becoming aware of how the two issues are linked. However, little research has been done, and few prevention or rehabilitation projects have been initiated. As a result, gaining useful and reliable data is difficult as statistics often vary from organisation to organisation. Nevertheless the issue is very real and social professionals need to arm themselves with facts of both the microcosm and the macrocosm in order to lobby for policy change, advocate for their clients needs and support individual cases.

In Europe, there is a myth that child sexual exploitation (CSE) only occurs in the developing world. This myth needs to be dismantled (Barrett, 2000). It is estimated that 30% of sex workers functioning in Western Europe are between the ages of 12 and 18 (Mullenger in Barrett, 2000). Sexual tourism is also on the increase, both within Europe and between European countries, particularly in Eastern Europe, the Netherlands and Italy, but also as a result of European tourists going to countries such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Tied closely to the issue of sexual exploitation of children, is the problem of illegal immigration. Even though immigration laws continue to strengthen in answer to a growing nationalist fervour in European nations, 'Fortress Europe' continues to have great appeal for those wishing to enter its borders. As borders have become increasingly difficult to pass legally, a plethora of alternative means have become available leading to the growth of trafficking. It has been estimated that 120,000 people are trafficked into Europe each year (IOM, 2002). Evidence is also mounting that women and children are being trafficked for sexual purposes into and through Europe, although the numbers are difficult to estimate.

The trafficking of women and children for sexual purposes is an abject, fundamental breach of basic universal human rights and it disproportionately affects women and children (USAID, 2001). Globally, it is estimated that 2 million women and children are sold and kidnapped into the sex trade every year (CNN, 2001). People are no longer confined to the boundaries of their own nation states. For instance, more than 200,000 Nepalese girls are assumed to be working in the sex industry in India, 10,000 former Soviet Union women working in Israel, and 20,000 Burmese women and

children working in Thai brothels. (CNN, 2001). Migration patterns are being redrawn by organised crime as people are transported globally.

The movement of people from one political area to another has been a clear symptom of the growing interconnectedness and mass deepening of globalisation (Hoogvelt, 1997). Western ideology has determined much of international economic and social policies in the last few decades, pushing capitalism, democracy and free-market ideology, reshaping global constructs (Brow, et al., in Barrett, 2000). Further, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 has wreaked havoc on Eastern European nations, and their economic collapse is assumed to be fuelling the sex industry within Eastern and Western Europe (Barrett, 2000). The opening up of EU's borders complicates the patterns of migration, particularly for traffickers with established EU citizenship.

The debate of women vs. children

Trafficking for sexual purposes is a gendered issue. This essay focuses on women and children who have been trafficked for sexual purposes. Although men are also exploited, the vast majority of those being trafficked and abused sexually are female and/or under the age of 18.

Debates surrounding the comparative effects of children versus women in the sex industry continue. One opinion states that the human rights offences are much worse for children because of their inherent lack of ability to choose to become involved in the sex industry, whereas the opposite opinion maintains that human rights atrocities are despicable regardless of age or sex (Barrett, 2000). The result of this long term stand off between feminists and child rights workers has meant that many of the statistics available on the issue of trafficking in women and children and sexual exploitation are confused, some with no age distinction being made and some ignoring the plight of those over 18. It is for this reason that this article is bound by the limitations of existing statistics looking at both women and children collectively and children individually.

Global trends in the exploitation of children

The exploitation of children happens in a great number of ways. Recent ILO and other contributions have highlighted the global problem of

child labourers, who are recruited particularly in low paid, sometimes dangerous factory work. Also growing international attention has been shed on the use of children as soldiers. There are estimated to be around 300,000 child soldiers in nations such as Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uganda (Donnellan, 2000).

War has a particularly devastating affect on women and children regardless, but their use in battle has been highlighted as particularly unfathomable. Child soldiers and children living within conflict areas are at particular risk to sexual exploitation (Donnellan, 2000) and trafficking. One BBC News (2000) article exposed the plight of Ugandan child soldiers who are purported to make up 80% of its forces. Other forms of exploitation of children include their use as land mine clearers, and other extremely dangerous work.

Children are often brought into Europe and other areas for the purpose of domestic labours and/or benefits fraud (see BBC News, 2001). Purportedly domestic girls can be bought for as little as £5 in Western Africa and appropriate documents including visas can be obtained for a further £500 (BBC News, 2001).

Child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is on the rise. It has been estimated that the global child sex industry, including trafficking, prostitution and pornography is worth more than the combined income generation of the international trade in global arms and the international drug trade (www.jubileeaction.co.uk/reports/childpro.htm). The Jubilee Action Committee puts the global number of child sex workers at close to ten million. With the increase of industrialisation and capitalism the sex industry has also become much more efficient and it is often run by large trans-national organised crime rings (Barrett, 2000). Furthermore the growing stratification of the world's wealthiest and the world's poorest is further facilitating exploitation of those who are most marginalised and pushing people into illegal activities as they try to close the gap. To illustrate the issue, supply, demand and impacts will be examined.

Demand

Castells (2000) states that the motivation behind the

demand for child sex is based, in part, on transgressing normalised sexual emotions, particularly within ‘bored professionals’. Others have expounded the complex nature of not only sexual exploiters, but also traffickers, procurers and others involved in the industry. It is interesting to note that research has found that the majority of child sexual exploiters did not necessarily have paedophilic tendencies, but were rather indiscriminate consumers, becoming child exploiters as a consequence and not as a pre-designed plan (Second World Congress, 2001a).

Supply

The underlying reason for the supply of children to the sex trade is thought to be poverty (Castells, 2000). Other factors include family break-up, violence and other dysfunctions, lack of sustainable livelihoods, lack of education, pressure to provide for the family, racial and gender discrimination and marginalisation, as well as other factors such as natural disasters and armed conflict. It is crucial to remember that the trade is demand driven (Second World Congress, 2001a, p.1).

Women and children are often procured by large organised crime rings, by family and friends, through the newspapers, employment agencies and increasingly through the Internet (Second World Congress, 2001a). Recent high profile cases have also surfaced, such as the ‘sex for food’ scandal in Western Africa where it was claimed that both foreign and national aid workers were involved in exchanging sexual favours for food aid in refugee camps (BBC News, 2001b).

Impacts

The impact of sexual exploitation is very specific to individual victims, but some common threads include physical scars such as HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, internal tissue damage, malnutrition, bruises, cuts, etc. Emotional and psychological scars can include disassociation, inappropriate sexualisation, shame, guilt, feelings of betrayal, powerlessness, stigmatisation, enforced silence, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, mood disorders, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bed wetting, disturbed sleep, depression, suicide and violence (Ayre, et al., 2000). Other long-term effects can include chronic ill health, unemployment, poor housing and domestic abuse (Bannister, 2002).

Many recurring themes ensue for the victims of sexual trafficking, including the risk of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, continued

threats, intimidation, physical, emotional and verbal violence to self and others and neglect (USAID, 2001).

Mapping the trafficking of women and children for sexual purposes in Europe

Globalisation has altered the nature of pre-existing problems and issues by internationalising them. It has also fundamentally changed the intervention of global issues by involving multinational organisations such as the UN in areas that would have previously been dealt with by national governments and local bodies.

The last few years have seen a number of international declarations lamenting the human rights violations involved in sexual exploitation and the abuses inherent in people trafficking. Some of these include, ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’ and the newly inaugurated ‘Optional Protocol concerning the trafficking of children, prostitution and pornography’, ILO ‘Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Exploitation’ and the ‘Convention on Trans-National Organised Crime’. The UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons was signed by 81 nations by 2001 (Second World Congress, 2001). Trafficking under the UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons is defined as “modern day slavery and forced labour that relies on coercion, fraud or abduction in order to flourish” (USAID, 2001:1). Further, there have been two World Congresses on Child Sexual Exploitation with their own declarations.

At the Second World Congress trafficking in children for sexual purposes was highlighted as a problem in a number of different areas including moral, organised crime, migration, labour, and public health (Second World Congress, 2001a). Although many of these conventions have specified that trafficking in human beings and the sexual exploitation of children are unlawful, and regardless of the fact that these conventions have been ratified by many Western European governments, the national legislation is often not in place to enforce such acts (Somerset, 2001). For example, in the UK there is currently no legislation pertaining to trafficking of people in or out of the UK (Somerset, 2001).

In order to understand sexual trafficking, further questions need to be addressed about who it happens to, how people are coerced into being

trafficked and where it is happening.

Who

There are an estimated 21.5 million refugees world wide, of which children are thought to constitute 10 million (O'Connell-Davidson, 2001). Trafficking in human beings is a universal issue and the interrelation between the market demands within the sex industry and the 'labour' supply from poorer nations is only beginning to emerge. The large profit margin within the sex industry is fuelling the issue and large organised crime appears to be facilitating the migration of people from the major supply centres to the major demand centres (Second World Congress, 2001). USAID (2001) estimates that there are between 800,000 and 4 million people trafficked each year.

How

The disparity between the rich and poor within Europe is growing and this is facilitating the growth in the sex industry. Men, women and children are lured into the trade by various means. A common ploy includes the promise of work abroad, but upon arrival individuals find themselves in debt bondage and are forced into prostitution. Girls from Balkan states have alleged that they were lured, with the promise of work, but then raped and quickly shipped and sold to pimps in Italy or other nations (Save the Children, 2002a). Others are kidnapped and some, particularly children who had been trafficked from Western Africa, have been coerced with the threat of voodoo or 'juju' where their lives, as well as the lives of their families and friends are threatened if they did not cooperate (BBC News, 2001a). The journey within Africa is often arduous and the BBC reports that many children die *en route*. Debt bondages once arriving in Europe can be as high as £50,000, taking years of prostituting day and night to pay off (Pannell, 2001).

Other less organised sex trades occur for sheer survival. For instance, social professionals working with youths in Eastern Europe have noted the rise in children who have admitted to giving sexual favours in return for food or shelter (BBC News, 2001a) and in Bosnia during the war, there were assertions that children between the ages of 12 and 18 were trading sex for official papers (O'Connell-Davidson, 2001).

Many of the women and children who are victims of trafficking are further compromised by their innate illegal status. Many fear seeking assistance

because of fears of retribution from the authorities. These individuals are the most vulnerable and the most difficult for social professionals to engage with (Second World Congress, 2001).

Where

One official interviewed for an ECPAT UK survey indicated that he believed women and children had been trafficked from West Africa for at least thirty years (Somerset, 2001: p.21). This coincides with a relatively high amount of information concerning the trafficking patterns from Western Africa, while less is known about children coming from Eastern Europe or other regions (BBC News, 2001a). In January 2001 the BBC stated that hundreds of children from Nigeria and Turin had been trafficked to the UK and equated it with nothing less than sexual slavery. In 2000, a UK Police Report was released stating the number of women trafficked into the UK for sexual purposes (Kelly, et al., 2000). However ages were not given and an unknown percentage of the cases were children.

ECPAT groups from Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK began research into the incidence of children being trafficked from Eastern European countries into their respective countries in 2000 (Somerset, 2001). The exercise reiterated the lack of existing information available regarding the number of children coming into the UK and other European nations. The study further pointed out that there are approximately 5,000-10,000 unaccompanied minors in the UK (Somerset, 2001).

The study found 66 cases of children who had been trafficked into the UK for sexual purposes, but estimates that at the very least hundreds are annually brought into the UK. In West Sussex, one English local authority, 66 children had gone missing from Social Services and were thought to be at risk of sexual exploitation (Somerset, 2001). CNN has reported on the abductions of children from social services for the assumed purpose of sexual exploitation (2001).

There exists a very complex geographic migration pattern, both within and between European nations, but also from Asia, Africa and Latin America (see Chart 1 [on pp.18-19] for a breakdown of migration patterns). Overall it appears that many women and children are being trafficked from Eastern Europe into Western Europe, particularly Italy and the Netherlands.

Chart 1: Mapping of European migration and trafficking for sexual purposes				
Nation	Sending Nation (going to...)	Transit Nation (going to...)	Receiving Nation (coming from...)	Notes
Albania	Italy, Belgium, Greece & some to the Netherlands & the UK			
Belgium		Yes	From many nations, many from Macedonia	According to the US State Department (2002) 45 children from 26 countries were trafficked to Belgium and political will to tackle the problem has not yet materialised.
Bosnia-Herzegovina		Italy and Western Europe	Yes	
Bulgaria	Greece, Italy & Austria			
Denmark			Eastern Europe & Southeast Asia	Denmark launched a commission to look into the problem of trafficking of children for sexual purposes, but dropped it in 1999. Although it is recognised as an issue in Denmark, few statistics exist.
France				No data
Germany		Yes	Eastern Europe (80%) including Poland, Czech Republic and Ukraine, but also from former Soviet Union countries & various other parts of the world.	In Germany, ECPAT states that trafficking of children into the country for sexual purposes is a major predicament with approx. 2,000 - 20,000 women and children, usually between the ages of 16-25 brought into the country each year. The German government has a working group on the 'Trade in Women' whose aims include the training of various key personnel, and legislation exists to protect children in the instance of trafficking for sexual purposes
Greece				no data
Hungary		Bosnia-Herzegovina		
Italy			Nigeria, Ghana, Albania & other Eastern European nations	ECPAT Italy, using reports from the US State Department and Caritas states that between 1,500 and 2,300 children are trafficked into Italy and approx. 25,000 foreign women are working in the sex industry. The Ministry of Equal Opportunities puts the number closer to 35,000 with 1,000-1,500 forcibly working. Complex organisations facilitate the procurement and transportation of women and children who are often lured by the promise of large salaries, but debt bondage is not uncommon. A common route into the country is via the sea.

Chart 1: (continued)

Nation	Sending Nation (going to...)	Transit Nation (going to...)	Receiving Nation (coming from...)	Notes
Kosovo			Yes	
Moldova	Western Europe			
Netherlands			Nigeria, Morocco, China & other West African nations	ECPAT reports that there have been particular problems with refugees and asylum seekers going missing, noting that they are particularly vulnerable. There are thought to be approx. 15,000 foreign women working in the sex industry in the Netherlands, however, because of fraudulent asylum claims (children are guaranteed asylum claims) accurate statistics on the percentage of children are difficult to ascertain.
Romania	Greece, Italy & Austria			Romanian women and children have also been trafficked to places further afield such as Malta, South Korea & Taiwan. Romanian children involved both at home and abroad tend to be abandoned children, runaways and other street children (Nistor, D. & Soitu, C. in Barrett, D., 2000).
Spain				no data
Sweden		the Netherlands & Denmark		Sweden does not have specific anti-trafficking laws and a lack of research has hindered establishing the extent of the problem.
Switzerland				Switzerland has not found sufficient evidence that women and children are trafficked into their country for sexual purposes.
Turkey				no data
Ukraine	Bosnia-Herogovina Italy & Western Europe			
UK		Italy & the Netherlands	Eastern Europe, Western Africa and other parts of the world	
Yugoslavia		Bosnia-Herogovina		

Source data gathered from www.ecpat.net and IOM, 2000.

Current gaps and responses

The global response to trafficking and child sexual exploitation (CSE) has several shortfalls. These were highlighted in Yokohama at the Second World Congress on CSE. Included were limited resources, limited research and understanding of CSE and its relationship to poverty, HIV/AIDS, gender and race, lack of policies and interventions, lack of user-participation, lack of recovery and prevention programs and lack of evidence-based practice (Second World Congress, 2001a). It was further suggested that these would lead to further victimisation, criminalisation, an absence of substantiated statistics, further human rights violations and would force victims underground (Second World Congress, 2001a). There was a note of the difference between repressive strategies, such as tightening national immigration, and empowering strategies that would explore issues like poverty and its role in the problem (Second World Congress, 2001a).

Further, domestic legislation does not handle the issues of sexual exploitation adequately. In the Netherlands, 155 cases of forced prostitution went to court, yet only four were successfully prosecuted (CNN, 2001). Most cases that come to court in the United Kingdom under the antiquated 1956 Sex Offences Act, due to a lack of appropriate anti-trafficking legislation, are resulting in sentences of between one and a half to two years (BBC News, 2001a).

Implications for social professionals

Although a great deal of victims come through the official channels and claim asylum or refugee status, there are many more who are unknown to the system, and these are the ones who are the most vulnerable and at risk. Initial contact could be through a number of different routes including social services, hospitals, GPs, immigration, shelters and housing associations, local authorities, the legal system, the voluntary sector, outreach workers, homeless persons units, HIV/AIDS clinics, Child Services etc., but still many will be undetected and unaided. Social professionals have a responsibility to ensure the protection of vulnerable and disadvantaged people. However, there is a danger of labelling refugees and asylum seekers as victims and medicalising their issues, further marginalising their positions (Donà, forthcoming).

It is important as a profession that we prepare ourselves with the necessary knowledge about this problem's background, scale and the local legal framework we must work within to address the issues. With the increase in globalisation, issues such as human trafficking and economic migration, social workers need to be more aware of the global situation than ever before (Midgely, 1997).

"In a globalised world, all aspects of social work are affected by global issues, and all social problems have a global dimension. Hence international social work can no longer be a marginalised specialization within the social work profession, but must be part of the day-to-day practice of all social workers, if social work is to remain relevant to the pursuit of human rights and social justice." (Ife, 2001).

Besides the primary response to the protection of the individuals, social professionals are in a unique position to be able to lobby for tougher legislation against human traffickers and those that would exploit children for sexual purposes. More resources are needed to cope with the issue, and also to inform a wider public that the problem exists and is growing.

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