

Prevention and Psycho-social Rehabilitation of Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is the product of a consultative process that is ongoing. It is based directly on the information contained in 20 case studies, prepared by non-government organisations, who are currently implementing programmes aimed at preventing the abuse of children through sexual exploitation, or assisting those who have suffered such abuse.

They have identified national and local macro-level factors that render children vulnerable to exploitation. In addition, they have provided details of individual and family circumstances, which in combination, appear to heighten vulnerability. Poverty, relative and absolute, is a key factor in many situations, but it appears that it is its coincidence with other risk elements that creates a situation in which the sexual exploitation of children is most likely. These additional components include changing value systems, the commodification of individuals within societies, the existence of an underclass, because of ethnic differences or wide disparities in economic status, family breakdown, and a societal ambivalence and contradiction in relation to the phenomenon of sexual exploitation.

This creates an environment, despite the widespread commitment, in principle, to child welfare and protection epitomised, for example, by countries signing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, whereby sexually exploited children frequently fall outside the welfare net. They may be punished, rejected and reviled, denied their rights as children, and denied an environment that offers an opportunity to develop and mature. For some, the consequences are life threatening--as a result of sexually transmitted disease, violence, used to secure compliance, or precocious pregnancies. For others, the experience of exploitation leaves physical, emotional and psychological scars that demand attention.

The case studies give practical insights into the strategies that have been adopted by the non-government organisations, aimed at protecting the child from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation (Article 34, CRC), and/or the “appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration” (Article 39, CRC). Many have stressed the paramount importance of creating a climate that is child-centred, that recognises and supports the rights and special position of all children, that understands the extent and nature of the abuse and its impact on the children. This appears crucial in terms of developing a political/legislative framework in which there is support for the projects, that promotes protection, that recognises commercial sexual exploitation of children as an abuse and encourages partnerships so that the child’s needs are addressed holistically. This strategy would promote the reintegration of the children into their families and communities and enable the children themselves to start the process of regaining their dignity and sense of worth. This is the key element in affecting psycho-social recovery.

The specific approaches will vary as they take into account the particular social and cultural context, but all stress that services and activities must have regard for the child’s innate worth, their right to be treated with dignity, and to have their voice heard. It is apparent from the case studies that all concerned, politicians, decision makers, planners, and those working with young people, need to learn from the experience and reality of the children themselves. That is essentially the rationale for this paper. Knowing what has happened to them, understanding their responses to the abuse, and the services and programmes which they experience as effective, can inform us all, whether we are advocates, legislators, teachers, community activists or therapists.

I. BACKGROUND

This report has been prepared at the request of the NGO Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to be one part of their overall contribution to the World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. It was envisaged as a paper that would bring together, and amplify the field experiences of a number of different organisations that were responding to the issue of the abuse of children through commercial exploitation, by establishing community based initiatives for prevention and/or rehabilitation. These case studies were to be based on a core of central information, the format for which was devised in consultation with practitioners. This was supplemented with any additional experiences, perceptions and analyses offered by the report writers, validated by their colleagues and the programme beneficiaries, that would clarify and help bring each unique situation to life. Through reviewing these experiences, it was hoped that a broader analysis of the problem and intervention strategies would be developed. As this would be informed by the reality of the children's experiences and needs and remain firmly grounded in practice, it was anticipated that such an empirical approach would be of direct relevance to those establishing policies and procedures, as well as of immediate interest to other practitioners, seeking to establish or revise programmes aimed at changing for the better the lives of the children, their families and communities, that are touched by this issue.

The starting point for all those working with children involved in, or at risk of becoming involved in commercial sex, has been that this is a fundamental violation of the rights of children. This basic premise is enshrined within the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines a child as "every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" - Article 1. Article 34 requires signatories to protect the child from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, and under Article 39, "to take all appropriate measures to promote physical, and psychological recovery and social re-integration of a child victim ... in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child." This makes explicit that the concerns for children extend beyond their physical and practical needs. It recognises that there will almost always be psychological, social and emotional consequences for children subjected to abuse, neglect, and trauma. Appropriate rehabilitative and/or compensatory measures to restore these children will vary, but will need to take cognisance, explicitly or implicitly, of the reality of the children's current situation, their external environment and their inner state, and the content and sequence of programmes or inputs that will assist them to regain a sense of psychological wellbeing and an ability to interact and function within their social milieu.

II. SELECTION OF PROJECTS

From the outset, the aim was to gather field information from many of the non-government organisations developing services and programmes to prevent and protect children from sexual exploitation, and/or to offer services to those who have already experienced abuse. This process involved the selection of twenty projects to write detailed case studies, providing specific information about the children and the communities in which they operated, their experiences, and the programmatic responses. Approximately 60 organisations, accessed through the network of contacts of interested organisations that were already known to the international organisations which formed part of the NGO Group, provided information about their situations, from which the twenty chosen. This account is, thus, based on the combined experiences that have been presented to us, representing programmes in all continents, across a wide range of social conditions and cultural norms, and responding to this dire concern with a range of intervention strategies.

The selection of the 20 organisations requested to prepare case studies was based on the need for geographic spread, the desire to include a range of different approaches and foci, the wish to provide smaller or lesser known organisations with the opportunity to present their work to an international

audience and ultimately, on the organisation's ability and willingness to devote sufficient resources to the preparation of a lengthy and detailed report within the necessary time frame. The resulting case studies provide an insight into what can be done in certain circumstances, the mistakes made, and lessons learnt along the way, by practitioners willing to share their experiences. They have provided a base from which some trends and directions can be identified, but in the full knowledge that these are not a complete picture of what is, or what ought to be happening in this field. They are based on work with children, aged from 8 years, (though the majority of programmes work with 12-17+ year olds), with both sexes, though the vast majority concentrate on working with females, over periods ranging from one year (APAP-Ethiopia), to 23 years (UNDUGU-Kenya). Some organisations have operated a pilot model, working with only a small fraction of the exploited children, (30 girls are currently engaged with the Slum Aid project, Uganda), while others offer programmes that have provided services to several hundreds or thousands of young people (Casa de Passagem, Brasil; UNDUGU, Kenya).

With the assistance of the practitioners themselves, a format for the case study that would provide a minimum of comparable data and experiences was developed. The aim of the instrument was to assist the agencies in identifying broad areas for inclusion while allowing sufficient flexibility to ensure that the unique or key features of a situation, or community, or programme response could be included. Details of the philosophy and orientation underpinning the work as well as information on the development of the programmes and practical steps taken to achieve objectives were included, alongside some assessment of impact and effectiveness. All were requested to consult and validate the contents of the reports with the children and young people themselves. The case studies themselves will be incorporated into the final report.

This paper includes information from all of the projects that have written, or are preparing a case study, but the process of information gathering in many instances is still incomplete. Clarification of ambiguity, additional detail, and more analysis of impact are still being discussed. There are still gaps that hinder a fuller understanding of all aspects of the projects. The final report is intended to be very much based on practice, and the temptation to make assumptions, pre-empt the field responses, or reach conclusions and develop generalisations from insufficient data has been avoided. This process will have been completed prior to the preparation of that report, by August 1996.

III. TERMINOLOGY

The aim of this study is to add to the information available, building on real situations and experiences, to provide greater understanding of the issue, and some insights into possible intervention strategies, that can be used and refined in other contexts. One of the problems that has hampered efforts to establish a broader knowledge base, which could inform and direct local, national and international policies and efforts, is the inconsistent use of phrases and terms. The discrepancies in the language used to describe and define the concerns create a lack of clarity about what individual programmes, policies, and objectives are actually addressing in reality. There are differences in the use of the terms 'child', 'young person', 'prostitute', 'prostituted', or 'sexually abused', 'victim', 'survivor', 'perpetrator', 'abuser', etc. While in some instances the differences are accurate and relevant, in other cases, the language used may be considered inappropriate by others working in the field. It may be seen as conveying certain negative values and perceptions, and demeaning. The linking of the abuse of children through commercial exploitation, with incest, and other forms of sexual abuse, may be confusing when seeking to identify commonalities of approach and gather evidence about the scale of each concern.

"The term prostitution is still widely used (but) there is growing concern that this obscures the nature of sexually abusive behaviour, unhelpfully focuses on a concept of 'informed consent' and frames children as offenders rather than as victims." (Barnardos, U.K.)

IV. INCIDENCE

The universal comment from all respondents has been that there are no accurate statistics of the incidence of children who are currently being abused through sexual exploitation. Part of this problem clearly relates to the preceding paragraph. How can there be consensus in terms of the scale of the issue while there is a lack of clarity in defining exactly what it is that the various groups involved are referring to when they speak of the sexual abuse of children?

Projects have been established in response to a perceived problem, but all of those working in the field have indicated that they are aware of just some of the victims. At times the problem has been clearly identified by community concerns, by individual referrals, or through associated issues, as in Uganda, where the problem became apparent in response to work being conducted on AIDS/HIV awareness.

There is a clear view that the numbers of children involved in the sex trade is increasing. Estimates, or guesstimates often include huge variations, but, even with the most conservative figures, the numbers represent hundreds of thousands of children whose lives and future prospects are being devastated by this dreadful phenomenon. NGOs, various writers and commentators have suggested the following:

Thailand, (1996) 200,000 children involved

Taiwan, (1987-95) 1978 children sold

Nepal, 100,000 - 200,00 girls trafficked

Philippines, (1995) 60,000 children involved in prostitution

Brasil, (1992) 500,00 children in prostitution

Chile, 50,000 working in commercial sex

U.K., (1989-93) 1,800 cautions and 1500 convictions for offences related to prostitution amongst under 18 year olds.

V. INITIAL FINDINGS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

The respondents have given broad outlines of the factors which create a climate, locally and nationally, which allows or condones the sexual exploitation of children, alongside more specific information about the particular characteristics of the abused children and their families. There are both differences and similarities illustrated in the case studies received to date, which will be assessed in greater detail in the later report. The following information gives the range of situations identified, the prevalent issues in different locations and some of the challenges faced.

1. Vulnerability Factors

Who are the children that are victimised and abused through commercial sexual exploitation? What are the factors that indicate a high level of vulnerability and how is this related to the individual and family dynamics that combine to deny the children involved their rights? What societal factors, political characteristics and cultural ethos, combine to produce a situation in which the sexual abuse of children through exploitation occurs, is condoned and accepted?

1.1. Macro-Level

In providing details of the demographic, social, economic, ethnic and cultural mix of the national and local

contexts of the projects, certain macro scale features have been identified as risk or vulnerability factors, that contribute to a likelihood of commercial sexual exploitation of children. These are critical factors in any subsequent or existing programmes that try to work to change opportunities and attitudes, whether of the broader community, families, or the child concerned. They include:

- Poverty, both absolute and relative. The large numbers of a population that are chronically disadvantaged economically, and for whom there is little access to opportunities for an alternative source of income, create a group for whom mere survival can precipitate their involvement in the sex trade. This may be self propelled. In many cases though it involves children being sold into brothels, by family, neighbours etc. This may be to repay debts or provide absolute essentials (India, Nepal), but it has also been seen as a means of providing relatively luxury items (Thailand).

Poverty creates a situation where many children will not be in education, and/or where many will be involved in the labour market. Both factors would appear to independently indicate an increased vulnerability. Many of the situations of children in the labour market, including domestic service, or living and working on the streets, deny them the protection of a family or of concerned and responsible adults. Some may be vulnerable to exploitation by other street dwellers, where sexual favours or services are demanded in return for a degree of protection from other gangs.

- Consumerism/Materialism: The commodification of individuals, alongside the perceived attractions of the material rewards of life (Thailand), has contributed to a change in what might be considered appropriate levels of respect and concern within families, neighbourhoods, etc.

“As for our culture, we are a community which is losing its roots; today consumerism, individualism, and competition predominate...” (G.A.N., Chile)

This change in values and attitudes allows a situation to develop, in which a parent might consider selling a daughter to a brothel, or intermediary, to provide them with certain consumer goods.

“..The greatest disaster and betrayal fell; my grandmother sold me. She sold me into the brothel for life for NT\$800,000. At that time I was eleven years old; there were many things I did not know, and when they asked me to sign my name, I did so. This was my signature to a contract that sold me for life to the brothel owner.” (Taiwan).

- Poorly educated, marginalised sectors of society, which provide a steady source of children who can be coerced, forced and / or tricked, into the sex trade (Brasil, India, Thailand):

“Extremely poor sectors of the population carry on searching outside the system for ways to survive and constitute a subculture of poverty which reproduces and sustains itself.” (G.A.N., Chile)

This may combine with the existence of other ethnic groups or different nationalities, whose access to resources is limited, and whose esteem, or standing within the country makes them particularly vulnerable. (Nepal, Taiwan, India, Brasil, Venezuela) For this group, the protection measures or general respect that might be given to women and children based on a broad national consciousness or principles, is deemed irrelevant or unnecessary.

- A low regard for females, and the view that they are and can be treated as a form of property: They are denied a voice and equality in terms of protest or protection. (Nepal, Thailand, Brasil, Chile) In Nepal, the combination of their status and the demand from the commercial sex trade in neighbouring countries, has resulted in widespread trafficking of women and girls who are sold into brothels. Seventy percent of girls interviewed in brothels in a Thai study had been sold once, with 25 percent sold for a second time and five percent for a third time. They subsequently suffer all of the consequences of this abuse and reap none, or few, of the financial benefits for the services they are compelled to render.
- Weak, confusing, contradictory legislative frameworks that may contain provision for the protection of children, but where the sexually exploited child may be viewed as a criminal rather than a victim, or somehow treated as outside the category of children for whom protection is warranted (U.K.,

Ethiopia). An instance is the difficulties of prosecuting pimps and organisers in Chile where the offence would be one of corruption of morals, to which the fact that a child has been labelled a prostitute already would be considered a defence.

“You cannot corrupt that which is already corrupted”.

- Government corruption: This may aggravate a confusing legislative framework, where those charged with enforcing certain protection measures, in fact benefit from the continued exploitation, economically or through demanding sexual services
- Weak political will which effectively colludes with the exploiters: Here the incidence of prostituted children may be regarded as an economic benefit which directly profits the exploiters, who are supporters of and in turn supported by the political decision makers. It may be viewed as a phenomenon that attracts foreign revenue through sex tourism and thus as an asset rather than a fundamental violation of children’s rights.
- Cultural beliefs: In societies which combine some of the above factors with a belief in the restorative/healing powers of sex with a virgin, there will be a demand for younger children. Certain religious practices, e.g. the Devadasi system, although illegal in India, continues in certain places and involves or condones sexual exploitation.
- The demand for sexual services: This may be created by large populations of unattached men, e.g. in military installations or construction operations (Philippines, Brasil) which attracts both vulnerable individuals for whom such opportunity may mean survival and those seeking to act as intermediaries for profit. The lack of regard for these women and young people is perhaps exacerbated by the lack of taboos regarding the treatment of women, boys and girls of a different nationality, ethnic origin, etc. While some know something of the reality of these situations, many others are coerced or tricked into involvement. The methods employed to induce children into the sex trade range from rape to threats of violence, to imprisonment and maintaining children in conditions of slavery (Philippines, Thailand). For others it is compliance with parental demands.
- The AIDS pandemic has created a demand for younger children for sexual services, in the belief that they are less likely to carry the HIV virus. (Uganda, Thailand)

1.2. Individual / Family Risk Factors

Within these broad categories there are children who are exploited and others that somehow avoid it. Which factors protect and which heighten the risks of children becoming victims of this form of abuse?

- Family breakdown: This category would include remarriage and poor relationships between children and step-families (Chile, Ethiopia), children going missing from home (U.K.), children being alienated from carers (U.K) or being cared for by someone other than a parent (Uganda), and at an early age abandoning their home and family and trying to survive on the streets through whatever means are possible and available.
- Parenting patterns may be inconsistent. In some families parents have been described as suffering from physical or mental illness, drug abuse and alcoholism. They may be living in desperately difficult and stressful circumstances, homeless, unemployed, mobile, unstable, the combination of which may severely limit their ability to care for and protect their children.

- Abuse at home: Children may have to leave the family home as a result of physical or sexual abuse from a family member.

“..The girl belonging to households in financial and social crisis, through poverty and social and cultural marginalisation, is exposed to high doses of intrafamilial violence.” (G.A.N., Chile)

The lack of protection, sometimes coupled with a loss of self respect, a feeling of being ‘damaged goods’, makes the child an easy victim for others to exploit.

“These youths must cope in isolation having to deal with the emotional trauma of abuse, rejection and neglect which may have led them to leave home.” (Youth Link, Canada)

- Out of school: Children that are not in education, for whatever reason, are vulnerable. Whether this means that they are working, or simply operating outside of the school system, they are more exposed to risks of abuse. In many situations female children are especially disadvantaged often from a very young age in terms of access to education. For many, employment as domestic servants is one of the very few opportunities for work.

“As soon as a girl is 6 years old she starts to accompany her mother and at the age of 8 she is old enough to work independently” (India, Domestic Workers Movement).

In India, seventeen percent of all domestic workers are below fourteen years of age. This group of children are living with and totally dependent on their employers, for whom their employees’ rights as children may never be consciously considered. In these circumstances, they are extremely vulnerable to being sexually abused and exploited. They frequently cannot complain or seek protection and frequently accept their fate, until perhaps they become pregnant or are thrown out of the house as ‘corrupters’ of their employers, or their sons. At this point, a combination of a lack of alternatives and low self image can render them highly susceptible to further abuse within the brothels and prostitution networks.

- Right age group and sex: Although there are instances of very young children being abused through commercial sex, with one case study referring to children aged 8 on average, when they were first sexually abused (Chile), the majority of children involved with the case study projects are aged 12-17. The majority of the programmes work with girls but there are other situations in which boys are targeted or at risk of becoming involved in commercial sex.

- Another family member involved: Whether through active recruitment, through increased awareness of the possibility or decreased resistance to it, where an older sibling is already involved in the sex trade, other children are more at risk of becoming involved (Thailand). This is not always the case. There are reports of sisters and mothers continuing to be involved in or returning to prostitution, with the explicit aim of protecting other family members by providing materially, and thus reducing the economic pressures on the family.
- Drug use: Some young people are induced into the sex trade as a means of financing their drug habit. Others use drugs subsequently, to deaden their awareness of the abuse to which they are subjected, and thus are hooked into the vicious cycle of dependence.

Many of the children that are abused through sexual exploitation are multiply disadvantaged or imperilled. The complexity of factors that impinge on an individual and their family, which combine to push, pull, force or maintain a child in a situation of being abused through sexual exploitation, or which somehow, conversely, protect them from the risks, need to be drawn out of the reports and assessed in more detail, to look at orders of significance, most dangerous combinations, etc. The abused child may be a child of war, a street child, or a disabled child in addition to being sexually exploited.

“..Most of these girls were from broken homes, ... ran away from the wrath of step mothers, from wars ... and had suffered ... rape, child abuse, etc” (Slum Aid, Uganda).

The data needs to be compared with other research which has identified factors which engender resilience in a child, which might help protect the child either from involvement initially, or from some of the most personally damaging impacts of involvement, or which maximise prospects for ending the involvement and successfully re-establishing within their families or community.

2. Consequences of Abuse

The basic premise that children have a fundamental right to their personal integrity and to freedom from exploitation and abuse, follows from an absolute acceptance that such violations of these rights damage and hurt the children concerned.

All the agencies involved in the case studies referred to the distressing consequences for children of being abused in this way. These included physical problems, developmental problems, social problems, and profound psychological and emotional problems. The children concerned have been described in some of the case studies, as suffering from a range of illnesses, including T.B., respiratory problems, headaches, exhaustion, from sexually transmitted diseases, from injuries resulting from violence, inflicted either by those involved in controlling and organising the sexual transactions, or from the immediate abusers, or resulting from self-harm. They may be malnourished, or debilitated because of the inevitable hazards of a poor living environment, of poverty, or from self-neglect. They may use drugs and alcohol. They have frequently been denied an opportunity for entering or continuing in mainstream education and have low academic attainment, coupled with its consequences in terms of future prospects and access to alternate opportunities for income generation.

The psychological and emotional consequences identified include low self esteem, lack of confidence, self hate, feeling an outcast, unworthy, unloved, unlovable and feeling degraded.

“Prostitution is written on my face.” (Taiwan)

“Prostitution is nothing because I am nothing.”(Taiwan)

They may lose trust in others and yet through an immense need for nurture, affection and support, enter into a series of other relationships that are abusive and exploitative. They may feel helpless and hopeless, accepting their fate as inevitable, with resignation and apathy, and have little regard to a future in which they see simply more of the same. Some may use drugs to lessen the pain and blur the perception of reality.

“Our prostitutes need a hard hitting drug that can either block IT all out or that can remove IT totally. Only intravenous opiate abuse and crack cocaine seem to fill the order ...” (South Africa).

Others have poor concentration, and loss of ability to structure and use time. They feel powerless and unable to affect change. Many have retained or adopted societal views of themselves as immoral and corrupting and, somehow, to blame for their situation. They survive in an atmosphere of violence and intimidation where their very existence can depend on compliance with their continued exploitation and abuse.

VI. RESPONSES

The non-government organisations that have completed their case studies define their programmes as preventative, therapeutic, rehabilitative, catalytic, enabling and facilitating. None operate entirely and exclusively with just one of these outcomes in mind. All recognise the interlinkages and spill-over effects of their work but some see their area of expertise or arena of influence as predominantly in one field or the other.

1. Prevention

To most of those involved, prevention refers to a number of approaches. It includes raising awareness of the extent and scale of the problem of this abuse of children, of taking the issue into the public arena, rather than allowing the widespread taboos and restrictions on debate of sexual matters to act as a smokescreen which allows children to remain hidden victims. Ways of impacting on public attitudes have been explored that try to create an attitude that is supportive and nurturing of all children and intolerant of those that sexually abuse and exploit them. It also deals with reducing the numbers of potential victims by disseminating information about the reality of sexual exploitation, sharing techniques and skills for self protection and looking at the provision of alternative opportunities for those most at risk. To be effective it needs to take place within a legislative framework aimed at protecting the children, prosecuting offenders and with the expertise to sensitively and safely handle the disclosure of abuse, and within a context where these measures, both protective and criminal, are widely publicised and acknowledged.

- **Strategies**

1.1. Awareness Raising

As a starting point, information about human rights in general and children's rights in particular, may be a necessary backdrop to more specific programmes aimed at preventing the abuse of children through sexual exploitation.

"...Our whole organization is a permanent project whose purpose is to eliminate the violation of the rights of people under the age of 18 in Costa Rica." (Fundacion Paniamor)

Information about the nature of the abuse, its magnitude and its impact on its victims, is disseminated in a number of ways to impact on people at all levels of society. This would include targeting those populations from which children are recruited (Thailand), informing and thus pre-arming the children themselves and their parents (Brasil), influencing the politicians and decision makers generally, changing attitudes within the international audiences involved and concerned as potential tourists, donors, economic partners, etc...

"The aims of the project are....to raise awareness of agencies and decision makers of the issues, and to influence them to provide resources."(Barnardos,U.K.)

The way that information is presented, the terminology used, the medium chosen, all have an impact on the effectiveness of the message (Casa De Passagem,Brasil). These include using publications, television, radio, drama and music. Teaching drama to the exploited children, to equip them with the skills to write and present dramatic representations of the dangers and consequences of sexual abuse is one strategy used to maximise both relevance and impact.

"The drama on child prostitution is prepared in the form of a forum theatre with 8 actors, four of whom are themselves children involved in prostitution. It centres around the problem, causes and effects of child prostitution ... It has thus been a focal point for awareness creation workshops." (APAP, Ethiopia)

Efforts are made to influence professionals working in the child welfare field, so that they can act as resources for the children and communities at risk, work sensitively and positively with those already involved, and identify early indications that children are in danger, or already being abused. Rights campaigns may exist independently from projects aimed specifically at the problem of sexual exploitation. Where they operate, they aim at heightening the recognition of children as a group with particular rights, needs and aspirations, and the broad duty of care and responsibility placed on the adult population, towards them. They may be concerned generally with trying to ensure that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is included explicitly or implicitly in the welfare legislation.They may precede more specific campaigns aimed at children's rights in respect of protection from sexual abuse.

1.2. Information Gathering

Understanding the nature and extent of the problem is often a pre-requisite for effective action. Until there is some clarity about the scale of the problem, its particular manifestation and its consequences, presented in a way that has meaning for the proposed consumers of the message, there may be little motivation or political will to address the issue (Philippines). Despite broad statistics being used, while these remain inaccurate guesses, they can be more easily dismissed and ignored.

1.3. Advocacy

Lobbying to ensure that those groups that are voiceless or powerless have their rights and concerns raised is important. Taboos and cultural gags that inhibit recognition of the reality of the abuse, create a climate in which there will always be a lack of support, funds and efforts to address the problem. If it can be viewed as an individual aberration, as a reflection of personal difficulties for a few children and their family rather than a problem reflecting a destructive and dysfunctional aspect of many societies, then the responses can be minimised, small in scale and impact and almost hidden. Efforts to change and improve legislation and to ensure that the full authority of existing measures is employed to adequately protect those at risk, etc., are all valid and effective prevention methods (Philippines, Costa Rica). In the Philippines such efforts have succeeded finally in criminalising sexual abuse.

1.4. Network Building

In several locations, organisations have sought alliances and a network to develop broad-based programmes, operating from a multi-disciplinary perspective. These may have a campaigning arm that makes full use of their joint influence and potential for publicity and media links for getting across the appropriate information about victims and exploiters. In addition, through recognising the complexity of the problem, the range of concerns and difficulties that result from this abuse for the children, their families and perhaps their communities, it combines expertise and skills to address them more effectively. It is also of enormous benefit in dealing with contentious issues, where the strengths of the alliance can respond more effectively to hostility and conflict (U.K., Brasil). For instance, working with the media to present the subtleties of an approach in which policing and welfare agencies co-operate, can sometimes reduce public hostility which targets the children.

1.5. Rescue Operations

These operations, using lawyers, social workers, health professionals etc. and aimed at helping children escape from abusive situations, have both a preventative and rehabilitative component. As programmes accompanied by a high degree of publicity and popular support, these activities raise the profile of the victims and engender popular sympathy and support for those “rescued” and those who continue to suffer abuse.

1.6. Community Based Initiatives

To enhance the resources of the local leaders: These may be aimed at populations from which many of the children involved originate, where using role play, story telling, drama and art community leaders are equipped to take responsibility for informing and training their own communities and enhancing self-protection (Taiwan summer/winter camps; Coletivo Mulher Vida, Brasil).

1.7. Use of Legal Systems to Prosecute and Protect

Understanding the law, in both its roles, the protection of the vulnerable and the imposition of penalties for transgressors, has a dual impact. It increases awareness of the legal sanctions and protective framework, empowering the victims to take action. Such action has a potential deterrent effect, when the sanctions available to punish offenders are severe (Philippines) and restate social disapproval and intolerance of such acts. The project in Ethiopia has adopted a programme of increasing legal literacy through a team of para-lawyers, which includes children who have been sexually exploited.

1.8. Alternate Income Generation/Informal Education

Both strategies are designed to provide choices for children and their families, where entry into the sex trade may be seen as the only available survival strategy. For children who are excluded from mainstream education, their future prospects and choices are severely limited and this downward spiral of opportunity diminution creates greater risk of being sexually exploited. Alternate education, perhaps with no fees, offered to children who are also working, with a capacity to recognise the needs for those who have missed a great deal of school or who are less academically inclined can maintain a child's hopes and chances for a more positive future.

“Some girls are not academically inclined, but when (they) return to school, the schools emphasize the need to pass examinations so strongly that it serves to make these girls feel more and more inferior” (The Good Shepherd Sisters, Taiwan).

These primary prevention programmes seek to minimise the risks of children becoming abused through sexual exploitation, in a number of different ways. Some are pilot projects using experimental techniques for effectively and appropriately spreading the message and for providing children and adults with protection strategies and an awareness of the risks and consequences. In addition to the preventative component, almost all strategies aim at increasing the dignity and respect felt for children by others, and their own feelings of self-worth. This is a key element in programmes seeking to deal with the psycho-social consequences of abuse through sexual exploitation.

2. Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation refers to the concept of restoration to a former state, in this instance to enabling the child to be free from the negative physical, psychological and social repercussions of the abuse to which they have been subjected. In fact in many cases it actually refers to an improvement on the pre-existing situation, by trying to increase physical well-being, elevating self-esteem and respect and providing self protection to a level not previously experienced.

Rehabilitation strategies may be implemented through a range of approaches and in a number of different settings, including residential care, street outreach, psychotherapy, family linking and community work. These are in addition to the positive impact for the individuals that occur as a concomitant of the preventative work described above.

2.1. Settings

- **Residential Care**

Many projects recognise that children need shelter and a place of respite from the dangers and pressures to survive that are their daily experience working on the street. Many of the projects provide a space within which the children can feel safe and enjoy food, warmth, nurture and opportunities for self care (Kenya, Brasil). This can incorporate a prevention dimension, a sanctuary for children whose only alternative might

be survival through selling sex. The access to health care, and perhaps education, and skills training, that are incorporated into some of these facilities offers both practical help, but importantly, also help to restore to a child the sense of dignity and respect that has been denied. This has more to do with the way in which services are offered and delivered than simply a function of their availability. The residential facility is seen by most as an inadequate response at best, removing children from the community to which they will have to return. Half-way houses, an interim stage between a residential facility and independence, where the children are equipped with skills and strengths to cope with the pressures of surviving intact, in a harsh environment, are one way of responding (Brasil).

Children may resist the offer of a residential place, associating them with repressive means of dealing with the issue through placing children in institutions, using control and discipline. Children do not want to be coerced into care; their ability to make choices and to use the services in a manner and at a pace with which they can cope, may be critical in making the service truly available.

“.. the project is designed to increase acceptability of the service for the girls who are alienated from formal agencies” (Barnardos, U.K.).

- **Outreach Work**

This includes both making contact and working with children within their own milieu, including the bars and beer halls, in the slums and red-light areas. In this setting, children are not pressured, but can access information, seek medical and legal advice, discuss alternative support systems and receive some attention and nurture for themselves as children first and foremost (Slum Aid, Uganda). In addition it may also involve contact with the families. At times, this is to confront parents with their responsibilities for their children and to maintain the links so that the children can eventually return (UNDUGU, Kenya).

This service may be complemented by drop-in centres, located within easy reach of the children, where they can rest, eat, wash themselves and their clothes and enjoy a degree of space, safety and privacy (U.K.). Many of these facilities operate from a multi-disciplinary base, with health, education, legal and counselling services available. They may be a centre for distribution of condoms and other contraceptive advice, helping children to avoid sexually transmitted disease or precocious pregnancy. Advocacy and networking with other services in the community are also key elements in enhancing access to appropriate services. For many there is a slow evolution in the type and quality of services requested by the children, which builds on the initial trust and respect established through the provision of practical support, to being able to deal with the pain of their experiences and their revised sense of self (Brasil).

It has been suggested though, that services which sustain children, might also prolong the time they spend in exploitative situations. Achieving a balance between this ‘misplaced compassion’ and providing life-saving emergency shelter, is a critical dilemma for some organisations.

“It is easy for a centre to lengthen the time the child will spend on the Street by cushioning its terrible realities from her.....*On the negative side, we have buried almost 200 girls over the past 5 years*” (The House, South Africa).

- **Community Work**

Work within communities takes a variety of forms. Mobilising communities to develop and sustain a network of supportive relationships for children that have been sexually exploited appears to be a critical but challenging step in the child’s successful reintegration. Their acceptance and valuing within the community are powerful forces enabling the child to re-evaluate their own self image. This may be a crucial element in changing family attitudes, to allow re-entry into families, while strengthening their protection capacity. Establishing alternate income generation activities, trade training, building funding or credit facilities into the system, are also ways of trying to promote improved long term prospects for these exploited children and their families.

2.2. Psycho-Social Rehabilitation Approaches and Techniques

The organisations in the case studies all recognised that children's needs extended beyond the practical; they saw at first hand the pain experienced by the children and the emotional and psychological trauma that has resulted, but many have experienced difficulties in terms of resources and/or expertise, in fully meeting these needs. However, they are attempting to offer children a service that addresses at least some of their psycho-social needs. To do this they need to assess:

- the nature of who the children are, looking at each child's experiences and his/her responses to them,
- others within their social context; individuals, groups, systems, that have been crucial in defining the child's experiences, both positive and negative,
- and how these interact.

The traumatic experiences cannot be isolated from their societal context and thus whatever treatment/therapy is offered, it must take the social phenomena that are the child's reality, fully into account. Programmes that fail to do so will be in danger of treating the child simply as a dysfunctional individual. This wider approach applies both in assessing the children's past experiences and future options. It is essential to understand how the past has contributed to any current pathology and to assess coping mechanisms and resources. In looking towards the future these elements can be harnessed and integrated with the appropriate intervention programmes, to combine to help each child achieve an enhanced and healthy maturity.

2.3. Techniques

Within all of these settings, the models of work that are seen as most effective look at the best ways of fostering the child's own sense of his/her worth. They incorporate three basic elements - teaching, healing and caring (Philippines). Through these they hope that the child can be helped to deal with the dysfunctional elements in their life. They frequently refer to the critical importance of listening to the children, responding to what they are saying about their own experiences, and what services and facilities they need.

"... An approach that is honest enough to respect and value the experiences and opinions of the young women who use the project will be one that engages their participation in the service" (Barnardos, U.K.).

This may be within therapeutic, clinical situations, offering intensive, individual, long term psychotherapy, but generally such projects are not widely available. Their high cost and ability to impact on very few children, relative to the scale of the problem, probably limits their immediate replaceability in many parts of the developing world.

"Providing group therapy allows for more effective treatment, especially at the adolescent stage, for more children within the same time frame" (Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Sexually Abused and Prostituted Children, Philippines).

There has been some work on the application of such models, or at least of the utilisation of the insights learnt within these systems, to other settings, but the implementation, appropriateness, cross-cultural adaptability and applicability of some of this work is still being tested (Radda Barnen, Sweden and Philippines). Counselling, as it exists within many of the programmes, helps the child to see their experience as an abuse in which they are the victims or survivors, rather than as culpable and corrupting outcasts, 'removing the shame'.

"... I can only rejoice and keep on thanking and being grateful that I have escaped from my unhappy 'black'

underground experience, and moving ahead with courage to face a bright and clean future ...” (Taiwan).

Again, such positive, affirming messages may be inherent in the everyday interactions of carers and children, rather than explicit, though it is extremely important for children to be clearly reassured about this and they may need to hear it directly.

These children have frequently been labelled by much of society and officialdom as ‘common prostitutes’, as immoral, as degenerates. They have an enormous need to be seen and referred to as children or young people with rights, deserving of support and nurture. Sensitivity to what terms are used and to what jargon or slang become incorporated into the programme culture are essential. Terms used must be understood by the children, but the use of street terminology can perpetuate this poor self-image, or self-hate.

Counselling is also used to explore options and choices with the young people, allowing them to make informed choices for themselves (U.K.). For this to be successful, it has to proceed at the pace dictated by the child. Information may be perceived as value laden; it may be presented in a way that makes the child feel obligated to the counsellor, and trying to double guess ‘right answers’, rather than making the correct choices for themselves. Decisions made in these circumstances are less likely to be acted upon.

Some projects, working with children from ethnic minorities, have made use of positive role models, drama, etc., to change some of the negative stereotypes that have been taken on board by the children (Brasil). The mobilisation and equipping of the children themselves as agents for change, as actors, as advocates, as community organisers and as part of support networks for others, can all play a positive part in redressing the negative images to which many have been subjected for years. These skills may be transferable to many other situations, equipping the child with extra resources. But in itself, this experience of being helpful, of being powerful, of being recognised, is of tremendous importance in redirecting the children, in starting that process of reassessment of themselves, their position in society and their strengths (Brasil). The use of art, drama and music, as mediums for the expression of experiences and the feelings associated with them are also recognised as valuable techniques, allowing the child to address their suffering in less direct ways (Chile). They can operate on different levels, moving from a relatively superficial, but enjoyable and safe experience, to a profound, life changing catharsis, in which the use of these expressive media, can allow expression, healing and self-discovery.

Working with abused children is a demanding and difficult task, fraught with risks of rejection on both sides. Some of these can be minimised through allowing the child to be ambivalent about leaving the attachments, dangers and excitement that may have been part of their experience. They are old in experience and yet have been denied the opportunity to mature and learn through the successive stages of development. Young people that have dimmed their pain through drug use may find it both physically and emotionally difficult to stop and be confronted with their past without this cushion. It has to be recognised that these forces exert a huge impact on the child, opposing the efforts to help the young person change and adopt new activities and attitudes. It means taking sufficient time, or working at a pace that is appropriate for the child.

“These children grow in phases and each time she tries she learns. With your help she can learn in progressive phases if she is guided not to see the end of a particular learning cycle as a failure” (South Africa).

The factors that motivate people to enter this area of work vary enormously, but selection and training are vitally important in allowing flexible, dynamic programmes to develop and respond to changing expressions and levels of need (Brasil). A commitment to, and inherent belief in, the innate worth and rights of the children is crucial. Values range from the humanist, to the spiritual, to the political.

“Our strategies and approaches might be the same as others, but one thing that sticks us together in providing help and care to these children, is prayer. This work can be, you and me against the world” (Kalungan, Philippines).

Some projects refer to the positive impact that finding a commitment can have for the children, though the

commitment may be to serving god, to helping other victims, or to changing society and may or may not reflect the values of the programme staff, funders or supporters.

VII. IMPACT

Though there were specific sections of the case studies that referred to impact and evaluation of programmes, many groups have found it difficult to be precise about what, for them, constitutes a successful outcome, and many have struggled in clearly articulating or evaluating the consequences of their activities. This may be related to problems in identifying the specific impact of perhaps one element in a broad prevention programme of which they are only one part. Sometimes the difficulty appears to be based on limited follow-up with the children, and thus the organisations are unable to determine long term consequences for the individuals with whom they work. Many projects are fairly new and thus have only relatively recent experiences from which to measure and determine outcomes. Some projects establish clear criteria based on the child or young person staying out of the sex trade and classify any continued involvement as failure, regardless of any other changes for the young person. They are concerned that some of their efforts provide a child with the skills to make him/herself more attractive and useful to potential exploiters.

Others perceive broad benefits, which have an impact on whole communities, where the abused child becomes a survivor and activist and may go on to play a pivotal role in changing attitudes and the climate in which other children can be adequately protected. Others talk of decreased numbers leaving the villages for the city, as indicators of a positive outcome. Numbers in school, or alternate education, or vocational skills programme are all cited. Some speak more generally of changed awareness of the reality of sexual exploitation, and enhanced protection.

“... Another qualitative indicator is the effect CPR’s work has in terms of building the capacity of the family and organising the community in Akha village(s),.....and on the national level, .(it) is the acceptance by different disciplines of the usefulness of employing multi-disciplinary approaches to child abuse and the reform of the legal structure to provide for the protection of children’s rights” (Center for the Protection of Children’s Rights, Thailand).

These are less easily quantifiable, but are clearly significant.

Discussions with the projects are continuing, to try to ensure that the children’s own views about outcome and impact are incorporated into any evaluation. These will be included within the final report.

The importance of defining criteria and indicators, as a way of improving and developing programmes, often seems to be accepted more in the abstract than in reality. Establishing certain agreed elements as useful indications of achieving initial objectives, would be a valuable process that would facilitate an evolutionary/developmental approach, based on actual consequences. This in no way minimises the difficulties in producing measurable indicators which have a relevance to the real problems, activities and desired outcomes.

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It will be necessary, in the final report, to re-evaluate the material, both factual and impressionistic, included in the case studies to try to establish, from the reality of this current work with children, some generalised formulations for successful prevention and rehabilitative interventions and establish some measurable indicators of outcome. At this time only some broad conclusions can be offered:

- The problem can only be effectively tackled if children, their rights and potential, are perceived as crucial, and central to future development and national wellbeing. To achieve a truly child-centred system, in which all policies are evaluated in terms that include their impact on children’s welfare, is

identified as being perhaps the only way of radically tackling this abuse.

"... Child welfare is not a charity, nor development of children ... merely a technical matter. Rather they should be the basis of national development. Children are the true representatives of the future. The way children are treated today is the yard stick to measure the situation of the country tomorrow..." (Child Workers In Nepal, Nepal).

- Raising awareness of the problem, about the number of children damaged and traumatised by their experiences, is an essential first step, if other therapeutic work is going to be accepted, supported and effective. This has to change public opinion, by accurately presenting the victims as abused children; "need to advocate strongly that this issue be seen not as "prostitution" but as the abuse of children and young people through sexual exploitation ... (T)he task of education and awareness raising is a critical and urgent one" (Barnardos, U.K.).

Information about the extent, the nature of the abuse and characteristics of the perpetrators, may all be crucial in forcing the issue into national and/or local consciousness, rather than allowing taboos, or the marginalising of victims or perpetrators to minimise or hide the problem.

There are many different ways of achieving this end, but co-ordination and consistency are pre-requisites for an effective campaign.

- The legal framework can both protect and victimise. Laws designed to promote children's welfare and protect them from abuse should be activated to respond to the needs of the children, while criminal sanctions against those who abuse them need to be enforced. This would also do much to restate support for the child and intolerance of the abuse to which he/she has been subjected. A system that introduces the concept of consent as a defence to charges of sexual offences involving children, denies children due protection, colludes with the perpetrators, and flies in the face of logic.
- Participatory models, involving the children, their families and communities, as key players in deciding strategies and content of programmes will probably be more effective and efficient. To be effective, intervention strategies must be responsive and reflect what the children and young people are saying. Their participation as more than passive consumers of services is critical. The ability to really listen to and respect the children, families and community leaders, to believe that they have insights, wisdom, ideas and skills that can inform, direct and evaluate programmes, is important. Using and developing the strengths and resources within communities will help to sustain any positive impact.
- Partnerships between local, national and international groups, between professional disciplines, with the media and with economic interests, are the means for achieving sustainable change within the macro-environment and for developing integrated local plans for effective action. Organisations working in isolation find their sphere of influence and scope for achieving change, severely restricted, though with persistence and determination, even small organisations "can impact a society's conscience and the way it thinks" (The House, South Africa).

Some of the most effective programmes work from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Agencies and professions can combine to provide the necessary range of services in a co-ordinated way, and through sharing their distinctive ethos or approach, can have a positive impact across traditional boundaries, to enhance services, to alter the understanding and value judgements that might have impeded access.

"Shared learning ... is a critical component of successful intervention." (Barnardos, U.K.)

This approach also encourages those working with children to see them as whole people and to try to meet their needs holistically.

"... In order to protect children's rights holistically, we need to employ very broad and multi-disciplinary approaches which link all aspects of society ...".

- Addressing the psycho-social needs of abused children takes time and resources, but children have a right to expect services which are aimed at all of the consequences of the abuse they have experienced. Some agencies are focusing on developing quality care for fewer children, but in so doing, learning ways to enhance capability and promote successful replication.

“CPCR ... would rather assist fewer children each year, but provide holistic care in their best interests. ... At the same time we aim to build the capacity of other organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, to work on this issue” (Center for the Protection of Children’s Rights, Thailand).

Efforts to develop therapeutic approaches to different cultural and social settings, to find effective combinations of approaches and seek additional funds and support, are all necessary for the enhancement of the quality of programmes.

- It would be unrealistic to assume that any absolute or standard blueprint, with successful response strategies identified in a social and cultural vacuum, is possible. All projects will always need to adapt and evolve from within their own communities, using the strengths and resources of both adults and children.
- Given that not all children subjected to similar environmental or familial pressures will become victims, the identification and application of concepts of resilience, to build protection strategies for individuals and to enhance rehabilitation prospects will increase the effectiveness of programmes.

It is hoped that a feeling of solidarity, of not struggling alone, can emerge from the accounts of others who are facing similar problems, identifying small indications of progress, some working in very different areas, but whose commitment to improving the lives of children, working with and for the children themselves, remains resolute.

These insights can be used by other practitioners, to help them avoid some of the mistakes, strengthen their negotiating position, and to plan, implement and develop programmes that can successfully help children who are being abused and subjected to the most fundamental denial of their rights. It represents the shared wisdom and experiences of some of those working day by day with children who are victimised, exploited and blamed. Their voices can inform, teach and help articulate and justify the urgent call for local, national and international strategies for child welfare programmes and social mobilisation policies that will address the needs of these children.

ANNEX 1

This paper is based on case studies or consultations with the following non-government organisations:

Casa de Passagem, Brasil

Coalicion contra el trafico de mujeres, Venezuela

Coletivo Mulher Vida, Brasil

Fundacion Paniamor, Costa Rica

Grupo de Apoya Nacional a la Convencion por los derechos del nino, Chile

Intergracao da Marginaldo, Brasil

Centre for the Prevention and Treatment of Abuse, Philippines

Good Shepherd Sisters, Taiwan

Kalungah sa Erma, Philippines

Domestic Workers Movement, India

Centre for the Protection of Children’s Rights, Thailand

Child Workers in Nepal

UNDUGU, Kenya

Slum Aid, Uganda

The House, South Africa

Action Professionals' Association for the People, Ethiopia

Barnardos, U.K.

Youth Link, Canada

¹ Submitted by the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child.