

# A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON CHILD PROSTITUTION

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## Abstract

Child prostitution has received little attention, in New Zealand or elsewhere, until the past decade, and there is still a paucity of research. Significant barriers to systematic research and understanding of the issues are the invisibility of under-age prostitutes, problems defining what constitutes under-age prostitution, and the lack of services for the children affected. Workers in services for youth at risk are aware of significant and increasing numbers of young people selling sex, commonly for survival, and research with adult sex workers indicates that significant proportions commence sex work as children. Internationally there appear to be few services assisting under-age prostitutes or working specifically to reduce this form of child abuse, and in New Zealand only one service (in South Auckland) has been funded specifically to work with this target group. This paper reviews the available literature on the issues and recent efforts to address the problem.

## AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION ON CHILD PROSTITUTION

Because of the relative lack of public discussion until recently on the issue of child prostitution, in New Zealand and elsewhere, there has been a paucity of systematic research or literature on this topic. New Zealander Ron O'Grady has increased awareness of child prostitution locally with his three books – *The Rape of the Innocent* (1996), *The ECPAT Story* (1996) and *The Hidden Shame of the Church* (2001) – all of which deal with aspects of child prostitution and paedophilia. However, these books are based on news reports and anecdotal experience rather than research.

The information included in this review has been derived from a range of sources, including the personal experiences of the authors as researchers, personal communications with children

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engaged in sex work and with people working with them, and data from books and other written sources, as well as from documented research.

## NEW ZEALAND LAWS IN RELATION TO CHILD PROSTITUTION

In New Zealand, under-age sex (under 12 years of age) is viewed as statutory rape under the Crimes Act 1961, sections 132 and 133. When a child is aged between 12 and 16 it is a defence if the child consented, if the perpetrator is younger, or if the child consented and the perpetrator is under age 21 and believed that the child was over 16. When the sexual interaction with a child involves money and goods it is illegal under Section 134 of this Act. Section 144a of the Crimes Amendment Act 1995 sets legal constraints on people in relation to sexual conduct with children when outside New Zealand, and the organising and promotion of sex “tours” is explicitly banned in Section 144c of the Crimes Amendment Act 1995.

The implementation of the Prostitution Reform Bill will enable amendments to the Crimes Act 1961 to fully ratify the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in June 1999. The “worst forms” of child labour addressed by the Convention include all forms of slavery, prostitution and pornography, and the use of children for illicit activities and work likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. However, the passing of the Prostitution Reform Bill will not itself address the exploitation of children, or the economic and social injustices on which under-age prostitution feeds (Davidson 1998).

## DEFINITIONS OF CHILD PROSTITUTION

Defining child prostitution or the commercial sexual exploitation of children is a difficult task, with variations across legal, research, media, policy and individual perspectives (Kelly et al. 1995). Children involved in commercial sexual activity may well define their activities very differently than how clients and pimps define those activities, or than older sex workers, or indeed than social workers, the police, or people involved in intervention or prevention services. Due to a desire to shift the focus from sex to exploitation, commercial sexual exploitation has sometimes been included under child labour provisions, but all these definitions pose limitations (Kelly et al. 1995).

### Definition of a “Child”

“Children” are defined in New Zealand as people under 16 years old, and by the United Nations as under 18 years old. New Zealand law recognises the vulnerability of under-18-year-olds by making it an offence to employ women under 18 years of age in massage parlours (Massage Parlours Act 1978), but there are no such restrictions and regulations on rap parlours,

escort agencies and other ad hoc sex industry businesses. The Council of Europe definition of sexual exploitation as “the sexual use for economic purposes of a child or young person, which violates, directly or indirectly human dignity and sexual freedom and endangers his/her psycho-sexual development” also classifies children as under 16 years old and a young person as between 16 and 21 (Kelly et al. 1995). The United Nations has called for consistency around the world in defining the age of children as under 18 years, but so far New Zealand has not responded to this.

### Terms for “Abuse” and “Prostitution”

There tends to be a distinction drawn between child sexual abuse and child prostitution, the latter being seen as a commercial transaction. Child sexual abuse is defined as contacts or interactions between a child and an older (or more knowledgeable) child or an adult, where the child is being used as an object for the other person’s sexual activity. These contacts or interactions are carried out against the child using force, trickery, bribes, threats or pressure (UNECAP 1999). In contrast, “child sexual exploitation or child prostitution” has been defined as:

the use of a child for sexual purposes in exchange for cash or in-kind favours between customer, intermediary or agent or others who profit from the trade in children for these purposes. (UNECAP 1999)

In New Zealand, although under-age sex is viewed as statutory rape under the Crimes Act 1961, when goods and money are involved there appears to be difficulty obtaining prosecutions.

It is important to understand the specific contexts of child prostitution and its frequent association with poverty and family dysfunction. “Survival sex” emphasises the commercial sexual activity of young people as a way of obtaining the necessities of life, including food, drugs, clothing, transport, or money to purchase these goods and services (Ferguson 1993). Several studies have reported that young people did not view their commercial sexual activity as sex work or prostitution (Ferguson 1993, Hancock 1994, Stewart 1994). Survival sex does not account for all the reasons young people may be involved in commercial sexual activities, including sexual exploration, emotional attention, money, drinks, and other perceived benefits (Tschirren et al. 1996). The term “sex for favours” suggests that sex may also be carried out to make life more enjoyable or tolerable in terms of material goods or accommodation, or for emotional security, approval, attention or affection (Martyyn 1998). This is sometimes also referred to as “opportunistic” prostitution (Botka and Lye 1993).

Definitions that rely on a classification in terms of economic gain may be limiting (Kelly et al. 1995). Some sexual exploitation of children involves the sexual use of children as a medium of exchange between adults. For example, in the Kincora case in Ireland it was intimated that on-going abuse in boys' homes was perpetuated by men who arranged with the workers in the homes to obtain access to the boys.

The boundaries between child abuse, pornography and prostitution are blurred. Many of the children involved in commercial sexual activities are known to have been sexually abused (Giobbe 1990). If we define child prostitution to include situations where a child is given money or goods by the offender before or after sex, children of all ages can be subject to prostitution (Saphira 2001). If a child is paid for sex by several offenders, then we are more likely to classify it as an example of child prostitution.

Furthermore, child prostitution can occur without any material benefit to the child. Coercion may also have a young person being made available for sex where the child receives no payment, but receives "protection" from threatened violence to either themselves or another party. Another variation on this is the young person who has been deliberately introduced to drugs and must continue to provide sex to maintain the habit or lifestyle that has been set up. Jeffreys (1997) maintains that for the vulnerable and often victimised young person, there may be few or no alternative options. Tragically, young people may often convince themselves that they have made a free choice, rather than acknowledge that they have lost control over their own lives.

## INCIDENCE OF CHILD PROSTITUTION IN NEW ZEALAND AND AUSTRALIA

Because of the illegal nature of child prostitution, together with difficulties in defining it, determining its incidence is difficult. Most estimates available are derived from research with populations of at-risk young people, and may not be at all representative of actual rates.

In Australia 3,733 children were reported to be engaged in commercial sexual activities in 1997 (International Save the Children Alliance 1999). In a study of 102 young homeless people in Adelaide between ages 12 and 23, 35% had engaged in sex for favours (Tschirren et al. 1996). In a report produced by the Department of Human Services (DHS) of Victoria, *Overview of High Risk Adolescents in Placement and Support Services* (Protection and Care Branch 1997), a random sample of 20 clients on the DHS metropolitan high-risk schedule showed that 65% were vulnerable to sexual exploitation. An ECPAT<sup>2</sup> study in 1997 revealed up to 300 young people as confirmed participants in sex work in metropolitan Melbourne, and a

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<sup>2</sup> ECPAT stands for End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography And the Trafficking of children for sexual purposes.

further 300 were thought to be involved (Fitzgerald 1997). However, these methods of estimation would include only those young people who are more visible and who are more likely to come to the notice of welfare workers (Marriot 2001).

In New Zealand there are almost no hard data available (Saphira 2001). An ECPAT (NZ) national survey found over 195 known cases of child prostitution, with 145 being under 16 years old (Saphira 2001).<sup>3</sup> Both governmental and non-governmental welfare agencies throughout the country have contacts with young people who are known or thought to be involved in sex work, but the data are anecdotal.

### AGE AT ENTRY INTO SEX WORK

Another way to estimate numbers of under-age prostitutes is to ask adult prostitutes about their sex work as children. Of 280 female sex workers surveyed by Perkins in New South Wales in 1990, 25% had begun sex work before they were 19 years old; the comparable figure in a 1986 survey was 32% (Perkins et al. 1994). Five percent of sex workers in both groups had begun at 15 years old or younger, and the same study showed that sex workers generally had been initiated into sex at a much earlier age than other girls and women (Perkins et al. 1994).

In a recent study of 303 prostitutes in the Christchurch area (Plumridge and Abel 2001), 31% said they had begun sex work under the age of 18 years. Since it is illegal for massage parlours to employ under-18-year-olds, this would suggest that about a third of the workers began sex work on the street. Of 194 child prostitutes in an ECPAT(NZ) survey, 10% were 12 years old or under, 15% were 13 years old, 20% were 14 years old and 30% were 15 years old (Saphira 2001).

### REASONS YOUNG SEX WORKERS GIVE FOR ENTERING SEX WORK

The reasons for entering into sex work are complex, and are influenced by factors such as family breakdown, prior victimisation, homelessness, poverty, lack of education, drug use, the isolation of indigenous and ethnic communities, growing consumerism, and unemployment. For example, the main reasons given in one study by adult female sex workers, 25% of whom began under the age of 19, were related to supporting themselves or earning more money, supporting a drug habit or another adult, to be more independent, or to seek more excitement (Perkins et al. 1994). An Australian report on child prostitution,

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<sup>3</sup> This study surveyed counselling agencies, truant officers and non-governmental welfare services to ascertain how many young people they knew of doing sex work in the three years from March 1998 to March 2001.

including some children under the age of 10, reported that children were engaged in commercial sexual activities primarily to meet basic life needs such as accommodation, food, drugs, clothing, and money with which to purchase goods and services (International Save the Children Alliance 1999). In a Thai study (Baker 2000) of reasons why children entered prostitution, 85% cited poverty, but other reasons were a desire to be rich, lack of education, family problems, behavioural problems, materialism, drugs and obligation.<sup>4</sup>

Dodsworth (2000) has summarised the “push/pull” factors commonly associated with entering child prostitution. The “push” factors included physical and sexual abuse, poverty, neglect, family breakdown, bad experiences of the state care system or inadequate after-care services, homelessness (often as a consequence of running away), school exclusion, unemployment, and lack of financial support, together with consequent low levels of self esteem and feelings of powerlessness. The “pull” factors (often reciprocal to the “push” factors) included excitement, freedom, independence, access to money, support from others involved in prostitution, a way of seeking affection, and a sense of power and control in contrast with previous abuse experiences (Davidson 1998).

A recent report in Thailand found a growing number of young students were engaging in “casual” prostitution in order to be able to supply themselves with brand-name goods (Imem 2001). While the same has been said in at least one New Zealand provincial town (personal communication Police Youth Aid 2000) when the madame who approached the girls was arrested, this practice ceased and there have been no other reports of this occurring.

While New Zealand sex workers have a high degree of independence from pimps (Daley and Plumridge 1997), there are some young sex workers who are controlled by gangs (National Bureau of Criminal Intelligence 2001).

### Prostitution and Child Sexual Abuse

Much Western research has been based on runaways.<sup>5</sup> Studies of runaways reveal that over half were victims of sexual or physical abuse at home, 60% had parents who abused alcohol and/or drugs, 25% had been raped, and almost all came from dysfunctional families (Webber 1991). One Australian study found that 74% of runaways had been sexually abused before age 14 (Stewart 1994), and another study found that 78% of girl prostitutes had been sexually

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<sup>4</sup> Sexual abuse was subsumed under family and behavioural problems, as the students were not encouraged to speak on such sexual matters (Baker 2000).

<sup>5</sup> It is important here not to regard running away as the cause of prostitution. If children ran away to a village of women, they might be looked after and less likely to be sexually exploited. It is the existence of sex clients which sustains the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

molested and 90% had been physically abused as children before becoming prostitutes (Giobbe 1990). In an Australian study of runaways, about a quarter had engaged in sex work for survival (Wilson and Arnold 1986).

In one of the first books written on sexual abuse, Herman outlines how child sexual abuse, and more particularly incest, trains girls for prostitution:

The father, in effect, forces the daughter to pay with her body for affection and care which should have been freely given. In doing so, he destroys the protective bond between parent and child and initiates his daughter into prostitution. (Herman 1981:4)

However, not all child sex workers are runaways, and not all runaways resort to sex work. Janis and Heid-Bracey (1980) have identified three broad categories of child prostitutes:

- runaways, who leave home and are not traced by their parents, or who persistently leave each time they are brought back;
- walkaways, who are basically living at home, but spend periods away (for example, staying out periodically for several nights); and
- throwaways, whose parents are indifferent to what they do or actively reject them.

## THE HAZARDS OF SEX WORK

What is clear is that once a young person becomes actively involved in sex work they face a host of hazards and difficulties. The literature available points to some common themes; young people participating in commercial sexual activities are likely to have fled dysfunctional families, they are susceptible to unsafe sex practices, and exposed to drug and alcohol use and abuse. (Fitzgerald 1997:8)

There are numerous hazards in undertaking sex work, including rape, assault, robbery, abduction, clients demanding their money back after sex, refusing to drive the worker back to the street, or refusing to wear condoms. It is seen as more dangerous to work on the streets than in massage parlours (Plumridge and Abel 2001), and it is on the streets that many children begin sex work. However, the emotional risks and damage may be greater than the physical. Case studies and the testimonies of child victims speak of trauma so deep that they are often unable to return to a normal way of life (International Labour Organization 1999:18), as a New Zealand study attests:

Jeannette was only 11 when she started with “sugar daddies” and within two or three years she was working on the streets. Six of the ten street workers in the study were working on the streets before they were 15, three others started at 16 or 17 .... These young women recounted how they had left school and family and lived hand-to-mouth, sometimes literally on the streets, living rough in the open, under bridges, in abandoned buildings with no more than a mattress and a blanket (Jeannette) or even crawling into clothing collection bins (Suzanne). In most cases it meant squatting with friends, strangers, or clients. As Suzanne said, “I’d just sort of crash anywhere”. Others were in some form of custodial care. So the picture is of a group of young women frequently homeless, often with few family attachments and characteristically poor schooling. They had little capacity to earn anything but a low wage, some were not old enough to work legally or be entitled to any state benefit in their own right, they were powerless and driven to prostitution. (Plumridge 2001:207)

Several Australian studies have indicated that “young women in particular will exchange sex for shelter rather than become visibly homeless” (Dwyer 1989, Hancock 1994, Hirst 1989 cited in Fitzgerald 1997:8).

There has been some evidence to show that some child prostitutes suffer from mental illness, many have a host of emotional disorders and as many as 50% have attempted suicide at least once (Davidson 1998). In a Queensland study of at-risk youth, Stewart (1994) found that 65% of those involved in sex work had inflicted self-harm.

### Developmental Issues

The unique developmental characteristics of early adolescents may make them especially vulnerable to the numerous problems associated with life on the streets (Unger et al. 1998). All children and early adolescents are vulnerable to exploitation due to their lack of social, cognitive, sexual and physical maturity. Young people are protected by the various consumer laws, but depend on adults to explain how to use the laws to make complaints to get redress. In sexual matters, not only do they lack the cognitive understanding of the transaction and its long-term consequences, they are also still sexually immature physically and socio-emotionally (Johnson 1999). Clinical work with “ship girls” has shown that few understood even the rudiments of their own anatomy and arousal, nor had many of them ever experienced pleasure from sexual intercourse (Saphira 1982).

Most children and young adolescents are not sufficiently developed physically to engage in penetrative sex. The physiologically immature reproductive tract in pre-menarchal girls is much less capable of resisting invasion and subsequent damage by sexually transmitted micro-



organisms (Moscicki et al. 1989). The sexual activity is often violent, and this can cause internal damage, destroying the normal vaginal and infection barriers and putting children at greater risk than adults for contracting sexually transmitted disease (Lemmey and Tice 2000).

Characteristics of early adolescents may make them especially susceptible to maladaptive behaviour (Unger et al. 1998). Adolescents' cognitive thinking has yet to master the ability to contemplate long term consequences (for example, not using a condom, mixing pills and alcohol). Due to the dysfunctional families they may have come from, despite their street knowledge the intellectual and socio-emotional development of young sex workers may be slower than others of the same age. This may be particularly true of those who have suffered from physical and sexual abuse (Briere 1992). Some abuse survivors have learned that to think ahead is to anticipate another night of abuse, and thus never accomplish this developmental task.

There is also a tendency for abuse survivors to view the world as hostile, making it difficult for young sex workers to trust those who may be able to help them. In a child labour study of 467 sexually abused or sexually exploited children, the author commented about how difficult it was to obtain information from the participants.

Many of the children interviewed were introverted and reluctant to talk about themselves and their health problems, especially with unfamiliar people.  
(UNECAP 1999:24)

High levels of sexual activity and self-injury have previously been viewed as poor impulse control, but can be better described as tension reduction. Frequent and rapidly initiated sexual behaviour can make use of such sex as a distraction or excitement to maintain high levels of adrenaline and the avoidance of emptiness (Briere 1992). Doing sex work can cater to this sexual impulsivity. A developmental factor that may keep young people working on the streets is the social group in which their need to have peers is met.

For the young survivor of abuse there has often been no time for healing during the early pubertal years and the young sex worker is likely to be further traumatised from the hazards of the work (Farley and Hotaling 1997). In some way the risks of this work may fulfil urges to self-injury or at least self-distraction.

## GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PROSTITUTES

It is becoming acknowledged that there are particular issues for prostitutes who are not heterosexual, not the least the double stigma of being both queer<sup>6</sup> and a prostitute. More problematic, however, are the risks that this double stigma implies, particularly the dangers of being assaulted or raped. The stigma, together with a frequent incidence of sexual abuse experienced by these young people, also results in risks of suicide and other kinds of self-harm (personal communications Te Aronga Hou programme staff 2001–2002).

There has been little published research about transgender prostitutes, let alone those who are under-age, probably due to their relative invisibility. However, people who work with these youth report a high incidence of sex work among transgender teens. Worth's (2000) study of six gender-liminal<sup>7</sup> sex workers aged 17–20 found that they began sex work at an early age (for example, Jasmine was only 11 years old when she began sex work in Fiji). Several had run away from home to escape physical and/or sexual assault, and sex work was a way to survive (Worth 2000).

A New Zealand *Evening Post* article (12.11.01) reported that gay and transsexual teenagers thrown out of their homes due to their sexuality were dropping out of school and taking up sex work to survive because the social welfare system was failing to provide for them. A New Zealand Prostitutes Collective project co-ordinator said he knew of about 10 teenagers in this situation selling sex on Wellington's streets this year (personal communication, June 2002). The homeless teens he had encountered were mainly from the transsexual community.

In a study of London male sex workers, the six young men interviewed reported considerable abuse before prostituting (Gibson 1990). They left home very early due to sexual abuse, and were vulnerable to exploitation in their needs for survival and affection. Most stated that they used alcohol and dissociation to survive the commercial sex. Not all transsexuals have been sexually abused when young, but most have been harassed for not conforming to the notion of how boys should be.

Once on the street, learning how to successfully negotiate the use of condoms and avoid rape and assaults is difficult. Worth (2000) reported that all the gender-liminal workers in her

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<sup>6</sup> In the New Zealand secondary school system there is still a great deal of discrimination against gay, lesbian, intersex, takatapui, transgender and bisexual youth (Kathleen Quinliven, doctoral thesis in progress, 2001). This discrimination continues through universities, where a recent NZ study reported that 40% of queer youth experienced harassment in relation to their sexual orientation or gender identity (Berghan, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> The term "gender liminal" is defined as the adoption by certain individuals of attributes associated with a gender other than their own (Besnier 1994). The term has been used to cover the range of "gender bending" in the Pacific context, where Besnier argues that the more commonly used terms "capture only one aspect of the category and at worst are completely miscontextualised" (Besnier 1994).

study had been subject to violence both prior to working on the street and again as sex workers. Most of them reported having had unprotected anal sex in the past, but all now used condoms, although some were still doing anal sex. Thus transgender prostitution may carry a high risk of HIV infection.

In countries such as India, Brazil and Thailand, men in prostitution are required to cross-dress or transsex, and this is increasing in Australia (Jeffreys 1997). The boys report that clients are interested in a “chick with a dick”:

Some simply like the sensibility and particular appeal of the “trannies”; some are attracted by the “kinkiness” of sex with a transsexual; some are attracted to the idea of (experimenting with) sex with another man but are reluctant to choose a partner which is actually a man; and some enjoy particular sexual activities which require that their partner has a penis even though they prefer female partners. (Prestage 1994:177)

Their minority sexual identity, coupled with homelessness and drug involvement as well as sex work, can complicate the developmental transitions associated with adolescence (Sullivan 1996). However Worth (2000) noted that her transgender respondents showed few signs of hopelessness, possibly due to the strong bond they had with other queens and their relationship with a prescribed role within their indigenous cultures.

## CLIENTS/EXPLOITERS

Recently, efforts to curtail child prostitution have begun to focus on the clients/exploiters and the services they are requesting (Morton 2001). Understanding the nature and behaviour of people who perpetrate commercial sexual exploitation is crucial to its prevention (Grant et al. 1999). There is little written about the clients of sex workers, and most research is based on convicted men whose “most common characteristic is the fact that they engage in forms of action that constitute child sexual exploitation” (Davidson 2001).

The motives and preferences of the clients of under-age prostitutes defy generalisation. Some have very set preferences for children of a particular age and gender; others seek situations of power and control; and still others are opportunistic and, while seeking commercial sex, coincidentally obtain the services of a child (Grant et al. 1999). The advent of the internet has made it easier for people to collect child pornography, encouraging the direct sexual exploitation and abuse of children, and this is believed to be an influence on the increase in sexual offending against children (Carr 2001). For example, Carr’s study found an increase in the numbers of clients who actively seek prostitutes wearing school uniforms (Carr 2001). Knowledge of the availability of young people available for sex work appears to have some

influence on where clients look for sex. In Manukau City, after the first media publicity of child prostitution in Hunter's Corner, local cars seeking child sex were outnumbered by cars that came from all over Auckland (personal communication Swiftlink Security 2001). This suggests that there is a large pool of potential clients that we have no information on.

However, it is apparent that some men are very focused on their pursuit of children. The Wood Royal Commission (New South Wales State Department 1997) in Australia suggested that:

the behaviour of the perpetrator is compulsive and they are capable of grooming and manipulating children in ways for which the latter are unguarded and unprepared, particularly where the opportunity of a legitimate cover exists for their activities. (p.1059)

### Rationalising the Sexual Exploitation of Children

The seeking of juvenile sexual partners may be part of a continuum of social and sexual transgressions. Some men combat their lack of social assertion by the acceptability of mail-order brides. For others, this lack is heightened by belief structures and cognitive distortions that allow them to sexually seek out children (Conte 1985).

Most societies cloak the use of power in justification, denial or righteousness. Few of those who exploit children consider themselves to be abusive or exploitative. Exploiters may see the child as instigating the sex, consenting to sex, or obtaining benefits from having sex with an adult, thus denying that any harm has been done (Ward et al. 2000). These beliefs are reinforced by media promotion of youth, childhood and innocence as sexually desirable, assisting the sex offender to accommodate the youthful victim in his repertoire (Saphira 1989).

The common perception that men have very strong sexual needs and urges rationalises a belief that prostitution soaks up excess male urges "thereby protecting the virginity and innocence of 'good' girls and women" (Davidson 2001:14). The client sees himself entering into a commodity exchange rather than a social relationship. This allows him to overlook what might lie behind a child's "consent" and legitimise the abuse because he is paying a prostitute. Davidson (2001) suggests that:

many men's use of children in prostitution is better understood as an act of moral indifference than a wilful act of harm, and this kind of moral indifference is actually widely endorsed in free market societies. Buyers are generally expected to act solely on the basis of self-interest, and feel no connection with, or moral responsibility towards, those who produce the commodities they purchase. (Davidson 2001:15)

Social differentiation of "good" from "bad" women allows the child's status as a prostitute to override her/his status as child. In the same way, dominant groups within a culture can sexually exploit children from stigmatised groups without it interfering with their view of themselves as moral and good. A large proportion of exploiters seek out victims who are from different social groups than their own, particularly in countries with colonised indigenous minorities.

### CHILD PROSTITUTION AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN COLONISED NATIONS

While there has been little systematic research in this area, there is considerable evidence of child prostitution among colonised indigenous peoples in many countries, including New Zealand, Australia and Canada, most of it from people working with these youth. It is apparent that, as with homosexual and transgender prostitutes, the risks are high due to the stigma associated with their ethnicity and perceived "inferiority". In New Zealand there is growing evidence of a relationship between colonisation, racial stigma, childhood abuse and neglect, and under-age, gay and transgender prostitution (personal communication, Te Aronga Hou and New Zealand Family Planning Association workers 2002).

In a recent New Zealand survey, 39% of those children known to be doing sex work were Māori (Saphira 2001), almost three times the rate of Māori in the general population. In Canada, aboriginal boys and girls also make up a greater percentage of children involved in commercial sexual exploitation than would be expected by their numbers in the general population, and this is also seen in other colonised nations (Save the Children Fund 2000). There is little published about aboriginal sex workers and even less about any under-age aborigines, but concern has been voiced about risks to children in aboriginal communities since the AIDS crisis (Sharp 1994).

Indigenous children (and children from non-English-speaking populations) have been identified as being especially vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation due to the isolation of their communities from the mainstream, and therefore the lesser visibility of the risks (Grant et al. 1999).

## OVERSEAS INTERVENTIONS

Where this holistic approach is applied, benefits have been evident. Several overseas programmes have endeavoured to implement the United Nations guidelines. For example, the ECPAT/Taksvarkki Prevention Project in Thailand implemented the following strategies:

- Strengthening children through life skills education, training, leadership building, counselling, awareness raising, campaigning;
- Strengthening communities by listening to the people, providing people with occupational training, promoting appropriate cultural values, encouraging participatory learning activities, involving people in planning and decision making;
- Providing informal education and training to children to raise their awareness about children's rights and reproductive rights;
- Raising awareness about the situation of child prostitution in the area;
- Dealing with other factors which may precipitate children into prostitution such as family problems, drug addiction, and sexual exploitation. (Im-em 2001:15)

As a result there has been a major reduction in the number of children in northern Thailand entering into prostitution over the last 20 years. Through family planning, a decline in fertility has made it easier for parents to educate their children. Increased school enrolments, parents' fear of AIDS, and the 1996 Prostitution Prevention Suppression Act, which moved the emphasis of responsibility for child prostitution onto parents, customers, agents and sex establishment owners, are thought to be the reasons for this reduction (Baker 2000). However, these changes are complex and not always straightforward (Im-em 2001). For example, when Thailand passed a law forbidding child prostitution, they found that:

the clients' relationship with paid partners has become more private, which [making] it difficult to initiate appropriate interventions for sex workers and their clients. (Im-em 2001:7).

In Britain, services set up in response to HIV/AIDS included the Streetwise Youth Project in London's West End, providing outreach services to young male sex workers (Green 1992). While these services do not address the conditions that lead the young person into sex work, they do provide support for those who wish to quit (Dodsworth 2000). A Canadian programme for child sex workers focused on child rights and empowerment. By having their voices heard, it was hoped that these children would be able to influence public attitudes and begin the long process of changing their status in the eyes of society from villain to victim (Save the Children 2000).

In Brazil a street social education programme applies a holistic approach, which has spiritual as well as intellectual, emotional, moral, social and physical components. Workers assist the young sex worker to develop a "life project", to develop confidence and options. Its focus is

on the establishment of emotional links with the children, thus enabling them to become politicised. However, working on the street in this way is fraught with dangers, for in Brazil the police, the *justiceiros* (youth exterminators) and the middle classes want the children to be killed (Oliveira 2000).

Other overseas interventions have included:

- hostels for girls and day nurseries for infants to seven-year-olds to reduce the factors placing children at risk of child prostitution (UNECAP 1999);
- in the Netherlands, shelters for young prostitutes in Leeuwarden and Utrecht; and
- a manual for guidance on working with child prostitutes, intended for the end of 2001 (Ministry of Justice [Netherlands] 2001)

Australian services for young prostitutes tend to have had an outreach focus, providing hostel accommodation and safe houses for girls, boys and queer youth, and drop-in centres for at-risk young people have been available for several decades. However, the exploitation of children does not appear to have diminished (Grant et al. 1999). In an Australian ECPAT report (Fitzgerald 1997), reference was made to a report in 1985 that had many good recommendations for innovative services for young people involved in sex work, but lamented that few had been taken up.

A study of 10 young sex workers in Victoria, Australia, found that they accessed a range of generic social agencies for assistance with food, accommodation, rights, the law and alternative employment (Marriot 2001). Young people experienced problems gaining access to support during the night, as no 24-hour service was available.

There has been little clamour from the public against the men who trade money and goods for child sex. In Australia there are nine legal jurisdictions and each has its own set of laws that criminalise, either directly or indirectly, the commercial exploitation of children, but these laws are inconsistent and confusing (Grant et al. 1999).

## PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION IN NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand likewise lacks a coordinated approach to targeting under-age prostitution. The Action Plan presented to the Second World Congress at Yokohama against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (2001) refers to Te Aronga Hou in Manukau City as the only project that is specifically set up for children and queer youth involved in sex work (Ministry of Justice [New Zealand] 2001). Te Aronga Hou provides an outreach service, offering support, advice and condoms, together with an advocacy service, a training programme for young people who wish to investigate other options to sex work, and a community education programme. Rainbow House, in central Auckland, is still in the process of setting up

accommodation for homeless queer youth, and Rainbow Youth and Te Huarahi Oranga o te Po ki Manukau have begun to provide resources for gay, lesbian and gender-liminal youth. Anadi Nemrava, organiser of one of New Zealand's high-school-based queer youth groups, is negotiating with officials to set up emergency foster care for homeless gay teens in Wellington (*Evening Post* 2001).

Other generic projects in both statutory and voluntary sectors do offer support in a preventive capacity. These include Strengthening Families, Early Start, Parents as First Teachers, Rainbow Youth, Keeping Ourselves Safe, Peace Education, the Queer Youth in High Schools Project, the NETS programmes against truancy, and Ice Breakers. Programmes such as Health Project 198 in Christchurch have offered non-judgmental support to young people, as do the adolescent health programmes, Family Planning, the Prostitutes Collective and ACC sensitive claims counselling for individuals. However, all these services favour the 16-year-olds and over who have sufficient maturity to use these services to advantage. There have been fragmented efforts in the past to provide accommodation for youth at risk outside of the fostering organised under the Children, Young People and their Families Act 1989, and the Ministry of Education has established policy to be more rigorous in their employment of teachers without convictions. The New Zealand Action Plan also referred to the Children as Witness Pilot Programme to prevent further victimisation within the legal system. It is among this plethora of projects that multi-agency cooperation needs to occur.

While in theory teenagers over 16 years old who leave home without resources could apply for the emergency independent youth benefit, this can be a daunting process. In the *Evening Post* (2001) a spokesperson for Queer Youth In Schools said teens were intimidated by the process, and were often ashamed to explain their circumstances.

Child Youth and Family Services, the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective, Wellington City Council and the police have been helping to establish a scheme, which could involve at-risk teens being placed temporarily with gay foster parents of the opposite sex. A formal scheme would ensure caregivers had no criminal convictions as well as providing them with training and funding. Council youth development co-ordinator Lorraine Collinson said the Council was aware of the problem of survival sex among gay and transsexual teens (*Evening Post* 2001).

In central Auckland, the City Mission provides meals for \$1 to the homeless, and this includes children on the street, some of whom are known to be doing sex work. There is encouragement for them to go to the Prostitutes Collective for free condoms and guidance, or Te Pua Pohutukawa, the sexual health clinic at Auckland Hospital for teenagers (personal communication, Minutes of the Under-age Prostitution Meeting, Otahuhu, December 2001).



The New Zealand government's participation in the Yokohama Congress indicates a commitment to putting supports in place for under-age sex workers and working towards prevention of child prostitution. To date, however, there is little literature on government collaboration with non-governmental agencies. One initiative is the multi-agency meetings at Otahuhu, South Auckland, representing a wide spectrum of government and community agencies, including Police and Child, Youth and Family Services. This group plans to gather information about services available, encourage networking between those services, and assess the level of need for young people who are at risk of or involved in prostitution. It also aims to establish a 24-hour community-based safe house, which will have a detoxification facility for juveniles (or a link to one established independently). In addition they will develop a service directory and identify how government agencies can provide practical support for agencies working in this area.

### PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION: TOWARDS A "BEST PRACTICE" APPROACH

Prevention of child prostitution can only be successful when the commercial sexual exploitation of children stops (Martin 2001) and the factors that push children into prostitution are addressed. This requires a holistic, multi-agency approach, with both preventive action and interventions addressing:

- factors that "push" children into prostitution;
- factors encouraging or allowing exploiters/clients to seek sex with children;
- the impacts of trauma that both contribute to and result from prostitution;
- societal attitudes towards prostitution, poverty and social minority groups; and
- the generational cycle of abuse, especially sexual abuse.

Prevention and intervention must take into account the traumatic damage from family life that has made children flee to the streets, the subsequent violence and trauma on the street, and the likelihood of young prostitutes suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (Briere 1992); as well as the attitudes of the agencies the sex worker may have to deal with. Many have reported feeling most powerless in their interactions with social service agencies (Webber 1991).

The responsibility to stop the commercial exploitation of children belongs to everyone in every community. Education, awareness raising, changing attitudes towards children, conscientious enforcement of the law, criminal sanctions against the abusers/clients and unwavering and committed leadership in this area are needed (UNICEF 2001). UNICEF has emphasised that:

the most effective responses must take into account specific local and regional factors, and include an understanding of the different ways in which children are exploited, the places where children are exploited, the methods used to recruit them, and the procedures used to retain them. (UNICEF 2001:3)

The United Nations has highlighted the following considerations when providing programmes for children who have been sexually exploited.

- All victims need to be provided with viable alternative job opportunities through educational and vocational training.
- The compulsory education system needs to be tightened up and education used to assist children to avoid sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.
- National tourist boards need to encourage responsible tourism and discourage child sexual exploitation.
- Income-generation schemes targeted at high risk groups should be encouraged.
- More research should be undertaken to better understand the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and to improve the services to deal with them. Such research should focus on:
  - further effective, culturally sensitive measures to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation of children;
  - the exploitation and violence against child domestic workers;
  - the sexual exploitation of adopted children;
  - teachers' behaviour with children and youth, with special reference to sexual abuse;
  - the need to motivate child prostitutes away from sex work;
  - the effectiveness of counselling techniques in rehabilitating sexually abused children; and
  - the relationship between education and sex work, exploitation and abuse (UNECAP 1999:36).

Child sexual abuse and exploitation are complex problems that demand a multi-disciplinary and well-integrated response. The United Nations guidelines make five proposals.

1. The development and implementation of strategies to deal with these issues should involve relevant members of the public sector, the private sector and civil society.
2. Networking and co-ordination among service providers, the government and law enforcement agencies should be made part of their routine operations, and should also form an integral part of any action plan to address child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.
3. Organisations should be more open to sharing information with professionals working on child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation so that they can work together toward a comprehensive solution to the issue.

4. Programmes to combat child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation should be regularly monitored and evaluated to determine their effectiveness. The results of this evaluation should be shared with all those concerned on a regular basis so programmes can be modified accordingly.
5. Income-generation schemes should be coordinated with government poverty alleviation programmes as well as micro-credit schemes provided to the victims and potential victims families at the grass roots level. (UNECAP 1999:38)

Programmes are needed to reduce poverty, prevent child sexual abuse, reduce childhood trauma leading to the abuse of drugs and alcohol, and change the way we rear males to prevent them becoming sex offenders or sexual clients for children (Saphira 1993b).

Most assistance offered to young people in sex work is motivated by the concepts of rescue and reform, which are experienced as punitive and restrictive to those they aim to protect (Lee and O'Brien 1995). The Second World Congress on the Sexual Exploitation of Children at Yokohama emphasised a need to incorporate approaches consistent with the key principles of working with children. These include work that is based on children's rights, supports their participation, and adopts a holistic approach. There is a need to support cultural differences when these are positive, but to confront traditional practices that maintain abuse (Warburton 2001).

Empowerment models of social work are appropriate for young people whose experiences have left them with a sense of powerlessness and dependence on abusive lifestyles. The approach needs to be non-judgemental and person-centred, enabling people to regain a sense of control over their experiences and helping them to increase their options for the future. Such intervention cannot be imposed, and must be on terms acceptable to the individual (Foster 1991, Oliveira 2000).

However, the cessation and prevention of the commercial sexual exploitation of children will only come about when there is a change of attitude in the general population. As a young female aboriginal sex worker said:

They are always looking down on us and blaming us, but it's not only us. It's their husbands that are picking us up. Everyone is in denial; everybody pinpoints us and is blaming us because we are the ones out on the street. But they are the ones that are picking us up and giving us money. They're always calling us little sluts and whores, but they never say anything about the johns ... like they're picture-perfect guys. (Save the Children 2000:25)

To date there has been no concerted effort to prosecute the men who sexually use children on the streets.

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<sup>8</sup> Code indicating where sources are available: nzaf - New Zealand Aids Foundation, ecpat -ECPAT Library, apl - Auckland Public Library, dsw - DSW Library, s - Saphira.

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