Children for Sale: Child Trafficking in Southeast Asia

The paper provides an overview of child trafficking in Southeast Asia. It highlights human rights and international laws relevant to this egregious form of child abuse. It describes the experiences of the young victims and the consequences for their physical and emotional well-being. It reviews the risk factors at the level of the community setting (poverty and economic inequality), the child and his/her family (gender, age, race/ethnicity, family functioning, education) and broader contextual variables at the macro level (gender inequality and discrimination, demand factors). Finally, it presents recommendations for legal and policy initiatives to cease the sale and exploitation of children.

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KEY WORDS: child trafficking; commercial sexual exploitation; Southeast Asia

Abuse through trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people to and through Southeast Asia

Although human trafficking is not a new phenomenon, it has acquired grave dimension worldwide in the context of globalisation (D’Cunha, 2002; International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2007). The illegal trading of people for the purpose of exploiting their labour is a fundamental violation of their human rights. Since efforts to combat this form of modern-day slavery have been inefficient and uncoordinated, it has been described as an ‘international shame’ (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2006, p. 10). The enslavement of children affects countless numbers of victims, who are routinely transported away from their homes and smuggled across borders, or trafficked within their home countries, and sold like commodities in a multibillion dollar industry that operates with impunity (IOM, 2004; Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), 2005). As noted by End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT, 2002), unlike drugs or arms, children can be ‘sold’ numerous times, with the price the trafficker receives often portrayed as an agent’s fee.
This paper focuses on child trafficking in Southeast Asia, and particularly the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Vietnam and the Yunnan Province of China) (Figure 1). While there is some overlap with other regions of the world, the issues are not identical (ECPAT, 2006a; Farr, 2005; IOM, 2007; UNICEF, 2004, 2005; United States (US) Department of State, 2007; UNODC, 2006). The situation for young people in the United Kingdom, for example, is linked to economic and political changes in Central and Eastern Europe and within Western European economies (Chase and Statham, 2005; Pearce, 2000; Walthius and Blaak, 2002). Most of the children who were recently trafficked through or from southeastern Europe came from Albania, the Republic of Moldova and Romania, with fewer numbers coming from Kosova and Bulgaria (UNICEF, 2006). Child trafficking in Europe includes commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), irregular adoption, live-in domestic servants, begging, criminal activities including stealing and housebreaking, and removal of body organs (UNICEF, 2006). Child trafficking in southeastern Europe is linked with (a) immediate causes (decisions made by children, adolescents, their parents and other individuals around them), (b) underlying causes (conditions that influence such decisions by individuals including unawareness of risks involved and trust in people from the same community), and (c) structural causes (economic crisis,
social exclusion, gender discrimination, weak legal and social protection systems) (UNICEF and Terre des Hommes, 2006). Dottridge (2002) describes how endemic rural poverty in Africa often causes poor families to sell their children to traffickers, hoping for improved circumstances for their children. India, however, has the world’s largest labour trafficking problem, with untold numbers of children experiencing routine physical and sexual abuse while enslaved in the carpet industry and in goldsmith and jewellery factories (US Department of State, 2007). According to Poudel and Carryer (2000), the trafficking of young Nepalese girls is rooted in regional gender politics and sexual inequalities, linked to widespread economic poverty.

In 2006, the author spent several months in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand and Vietnam in order to explore the issues confronting children in Southeast Asia, and particularly the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (Figure 1). During unstructured interviews with United Nations (UN), UNICEF and non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff who were involved in responding to child trafficking and CSE, valuable information was shared. This paper, however, is primarily a review of the literature, guided by the interviews and documents received during the meetings with key informants.

Policy Context

Trafficking of persons is an important threat to human security, addressed in the Report of the Secretary General High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change (UN, 2004a) and the UN Millennium Declaration (UN, 2000b) Child trafficking also violates the human rights guaranteed to children under international law, most notably the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Articles 32, 35, 36, 39, UN, 1989; UNICEF, 2002).1 In calling for Member States to take decisive action to halt human trafficking, Kofi Annan, then UN Secretary-General, stated:

‘The trafficking of persons, particularly women and children, for forced and exploitative labour, including for sexual exploitation, is one of the most egregious violations of human rights which the United Nations now confronts’ (UN, 2004b, p. 22).

1 According to Article 35, ‘State Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.’ Article 36 requires State Parties to ‘protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child’s welfare.’ Article 39 obliges State Parties to ‘promote physical and psychological recovery and reintegration of a child victim.’ Finally, Article 32 requires State Parties to ‘recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous to or interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.’
Human trafficking was first defined in international law in 2000 through the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Article 3) (UN, 2000a). Known as the ‘Palermo Protocol’ or the ‘Trafficking Protocol’, this is the most widely endorsed definition and provides an essential basis for national law reform (Chase and Statham, 2005; UNODC, 2006). Previous documents related to human trafficking and prostitution, such as the Convention for the Suppression of the Prostitution of Others (UN, 1949), or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (UN, 1981), did not provide such definitions. Under the Protocol, the definition of trafficking covers all forms of trafficking for the purpose of exploitation, including prostitution, forced labour, slavery-like practices and servitude. It also notes that since children cannot consent under international law, it is a case of trafficking if the victim is a child regardless of whether or not fraud and deception are used. The term ‘child’ is defined by the 1989 CRC, Article 1 (UN, 1989).

Additional definitions and protections pertain to CSE. The Declaration and Agenda for Action, adopted at the First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in 1996, recognised for the first time CSE as a human rights, labour, health, education and law enforcement problem (Mahler, 1997; World Congress, 1996). A definition of the practice was also provided which clearly indicates that the remuneration factor distinguishes the concept of CSE from the sexual abuse of a child where commercial gain is apparently absent, although sexual exploitation is also abuse. At the Second World Congress, held in Japan in December 2001, progress since 1996 was reviewed, good practices were shared and the main problem areas were identified (World Congress, 2001).

CSE is also identified as a fundamental violation of children’s rights under Article 34 of the CRC and an Optional Protocol to the

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2 (a) ‘Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, or fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs . . .’

3 ‘The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article.’

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

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CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography further defines these standards (UNICEF, 2002). In addition, the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182 (1999) includes CSE as one of the worst forms of child labour (ILO-IPU, 2002). Finally, ECPAT (2002) notes that since child sexual exploitation is ‘degrading treatment,’ it is a violation of Article 7 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and Article 5 of the American Convention on Human Rights.

Child Trafficking

Since child trafficking is a criminal activity, and lawmakers and public officials find it difficult to acknowledge the magnitude of the problem, accurate statistical data are scarce and unreliable (Arnold and Bertone, 2002; Laczko, 2002; Melrose, 2002; UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), 2007; UNODC, 2006). In 2002, it was estimated that 1.2 million children are trafficked annually (ILO, 2002a, 2002b); more recent estimates suggest that the number is increasing (Farr, 2005; NGO Group, 2005). The US Department of State (2007) reports that more than two million children are exploited in the global commercial sex trade every year. Furthermore, existing data are rarely disaggregated according to the age of the victim (Arnold and Bertone, 2002; Melrose, 2002).

Children are trafficked for a variety of purposes including, labour exploitation, domestic work, sexual exploitation, military conscription, marriage, illicit adoption, sports, begging and organ supply (Scarpa, 2005; UN Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW), 2002; UNICEF, 2005). Children who are trafficked, however, are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation (NGO Group for the CRC, 2005), with the omnivorous sex trade being the most widely recognised form of child trafficking (UNICEF, 2005; IOM, 2007). Since heterosexual prostitution remains the largest and most profitable form of CSE, girls are primarily affected, although an increasing number of boys are trafficked for paedophile abuse, sexual tourism, child pornography, as well as for the purposes of prostitution (IOM, 2007). Physical appearance is a major factor in assessing the value of girls as a commodity; the more beautiful the girl, the higher the price (Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW), 2005). Girls who do not meet the aesthetic standards, or who are too young, are

5 Article 34 requires State Parties to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse . . . unlawful sexual activity . . . prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices . . . pornographic performances and materials.”
marketed to domestic labour or factories. For example, some children as young as age three have been trafficked from Cambodia to Thailand to peel and sort fish in the fishing industry (Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility (CARAM), personal communication with Mr Ya Navuth, Executive Director (http://caramasia.gn.apc.org)). Children trafficked into one form of labour, however, are often subsequently sold into another, as with girls who are recruited to work in factories or domestic work but are subsequently raped and/or sold into brothels (CARAM, personal communication with Mr Ya Navuth, Executive Director (http://caramasia.gn.apc.org)); UNICEF, 2005).

Child trafficking involves internal trafficking within the borders of a country as well as cross-border international trafficking (D’Cunha, 2002). In Southeast Asia, Thailand is a well-known destination for victims of sexual trafficking, although it is also a source and a transit point (UNODC, 2006). Children are routinely trafficked for CSE from Thailand into Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam within the Greater Mekong Sub-region, as well as beyond (for example, Japan, Korea, Malaysia and the Middle East). In recent years, these destinations have also emerged as source sites (D’Cunha, 2002). Cambodian girls, for instance, are routinely trafficked into Thailand to meet the demand for an international selection of child prostitutes and Vietnamese girls are now trafficked into Cambodia (Kane, 1998). Vietnamese girls who voluntarily migrate to China in search of a better life working in karaoke rooms or restaurants are often subsequently trafficked and sold as sexual slaves (Center for Reproductive and Family Health (RAFH), personal communication with Dr Nguyen Thi Hoai Duc, Director, Hanoi (http://www.rafh-vie.org/collaboration.htm)). Laos has also emerged as an important source site with the majority of cross-border trafficking occurring into Thailand, although some children are trafficked into Myanmar and China for the purposes of buying and selling brides (Laos and UNICEF, 2003). Some Vietnamese girls, who are sold as brides into China as well as to the provinces near the Vietnam/China border, are subsequently resold by their ‘husbands’ to be used for CSE (RAFH, personal communication with Dr Nguyen Thi Hoai Duc, Director, Hanoi (http://www.rafh-vie.org/collaboration.htm)). An alarming increase has also been reported in the trafficking of young Kachin women and girls from Myanmar who are being sold as wives in provinces across China, forced into the Chinese and Myanmar sex industries, or who simply disappear without a trace at the Chinese border (Kachin Women’s Association of Thailand, 2005). The United States issues an annual Trafficking in Persons Report which describes the problems in each country. A brief summary of the key issues in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand and Vietnam identified by the US Department of State (2007) is presented in Figure 2.
(1) **Cambodia** — source, transit and destination for children trafficked for forced labour and CSE. Children are trafficked to Thailand and Malaysia for sexual exploitation and forced labour in factories or as domestic servants, some are trafficked to Vietnam and Thailand for forced begging. Also a transit country for the trafficking of Chinese and Vietnamese children for sexual exploitation. Within Cambodia, sex trafficking of children occurs as the country offers an environment where children can be exploited with minimal threat of law enforcement action. Numerous reports of public officials’ complicity in trafficking, including corruption and running brothels.

(2) **Laos** — primarily a source country, children are trafficked to Thailand for domestic servitude, forced labour in factories and for CSE. Some children from China and Burma are also transported through Laos to Thailand. Reports that some officials of the government profit from trafficking.

(3) **Myanmar (Burma)** — primarily a source country and children are trafficked to Thailand, China, Bangladesh, Malaysia, South Korea and Maccau. Some children have been trafficked as street hawkers, beggars, workers in the Thai shrimp factories, forced brides and for CSE. Burma is also a transit point, with Bangladeshi persons being transported to Malaysia and Chinese nationals to Thailand.

(4) **Thailand** — a major source, transit and destination country where children are trafficked for the purposes of forced labour and CSE. Widespread sex tourism is related to children being trafficked for CSE from Burma, Cambodia, Laos, China, Russia and Uzbekistan. Some girls from Burma, Cambodia and Vietnam also transit through Thailand to be commercially sexually exploited in Malaysia. Thai girls, and particularly ethnic minorities from the northern hills, are trafficked both internally and for purposes of CSE to Japan, and to countries all over the world including, Malaysia, South Africa, Bahrain, Australia, Singapore, Europe, Canada and the US. In addition to CSE, children (particularly those from Burma, Laos and Cambodia) are trafficked to Thailand for forced labour in the fish-processing factories.

(5) **Vietnam** — a source and destination country for children trafficked into CSE and forced labour. Girls are trafficked for CSE into Cambodia, China, Thailand, Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Taiwan, UK and the Czech Republic. Girls are also being lured into China with false promises of employment and marriage. Some children have been trafficked to the UK to work in the drug trade. Vietnam is also a destination country for Cambodian children who are trafficked for forced labour and CSE. Children are routinely trafficked from rural to urban areas for forced labour and sexual exploitation.

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**Figure 2.** Child trafficking in Greater Mekong Sub-Region Southeast Asia, country by country
Migration versus Trafficking

Migration occurs when people leave their homes willingly in the hopes of finding better opportunities for livelihood elsewhere. In many cases, the expectations of young women who migrate have been hyped by mass marketing and consumerism that has crept into their remote villages through communication technology and increasing globalisation (LSCW, personal communication with Ms Shelly Preece, Migrant Support Coordinator (http://www.iscw.org/eresearch.html#b)). Migration can result in exploitation and trafficking, but not necessarily. According to Arnold and Bertone (2002), movement across borders is generally ‘voluntary’ in the sense that the young person has made the decision to travel for work, often within the limited range of available choices. Young people who migrate, however, and particularly those who migrate across international borders, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, especially when their immigration status is unclear, they have no money, and they are cut off from their natural support systems, family and friends. Consequently, many migrants are subsequently exploited by traffickers and end up in situations where their health and safety are in danger. Other victims, in contrast, are trafficked at the first stage of their journey, when they are lured or deceived into leaving their homes on the promise of good employment opportunities elsewhere, or they are provided with false documents, placing them into a situation of debt bondage (NGO Group, 2005). Upon arrival at their destination, they learn that they were misinformed about what awaited them, and are forced to work under conditions of slavery in brothels with filthy and abusive living conditions.

It is the element of coercion, deception and exploitation resulting in victims being subjected to exploitation of services or slavery that characterises trafficking, regardless of whether it occurred at the beginning of the journey, during the journey when ‘help’ is offered, or at the end of the journey (ILO-International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), 2001; LSCW, 2004; Marshall, 2001). As a result of this combination of movement and exploitation, trafficking has been referred to as the ‘dark side’ of the population movement (CARAM, personal communication with Mr Ya Navuth, Executive Director (http://caramasia.gn.apc.org)).

The Traffickers

A range of individuals and groups contribute to the trafficking of children and include community members, private sector and organised criminal networks, with some cases involving family friends and relatives (Farr, 2005; IOM, 2007). In some regions,
traffickers recruit their prey through bogus or semi-legitimate employment agencies, through fake advertisements in local newspapers, or through mail-order bride catalogues (UNODC, 2006). Most children, however, are recruited by ‘family friends’ or casual acquaintances in the community, although some parents have knowingly sold their children to traffickers or brothel owners. These ‘people movers’ are generally poor, easily replaced and sometimes even unknowing links to a larger process. While blatant violence is sometimes used, traffickers generally use their familiarity with the victim to gain their trust while making a skilled sales pitch involving false promises of well-paying jobs, residency documents in more prosperous countries or marriage (D’Cunha, 2002; UNODC, 2006). Although most trafficking worldwide is done by men, some reports in Southeast Asia show a growing tendency for women to be involved as traffickers, including some who have returned from overseas to act as suppliers of children to those who will exploit them (ILO-IPEC, 2002). These young women tend to be attractive, nicely dressed and wear expensive jewellery and are generally working with networks of traffickers and aim to recruit young attractive girls with false claims of exciting job opportunities (LSCW, 2005).

Children are also being trafficked through well-structured networks, often with connections to organised crime networks in neighbouring countries. In Laos, for example, contacts are highly organised and appear to be formed into a complex of mafia-type groups, the largest of which are in Bangkok, but with a considerable number of locations outside the capital as well (Laos and UNICEF, 2003). The recruitment of children in Thailand is partially fuelled by organised networks of professional criminal organisations that frequently use forged passports within their trading activities (LSCW, 2004; Taylor and Jamieson, 1999). The US Department of State (2007) reports an increase in the trafficking of Burmese females both within the country and beyond and note the role of the ruling military regime in state-imposed forced labour. Beyrer (2001) describes the trafficking networks in the Shan areas of Burma [Myanmar] that routinely traffic young girls into Thailand, as well as the role of the Myanmar military regime in the maintenance of sex services on the Myanmar-China border. For example, some female victims of CSE who were returned from Thailand to camps in Burma were subsequently sold back into prostitution by the military police commanders in charge of the camps.

**Impact on Children**

Although empirical research is sorely lacking on the impact of child trafficking on children, several case studies and journalistic
accounts suggest that the impact on children cannot be overstated (Bertone, 2000). When children are trafficked away from their families, communities, and support networks and isolated in areas unknown to them, they are extremely vulnerable to exploitation. Those who have been trafficked across international borders are even more disempowered because they do not speak the local language and are less able to escape or seek assistance (UNICEF, 2005). Once trafficked, children are dependent on their traffickers for food, shelter and other basic necessities (UNODC, 2006), and fear retaliation from traffickers against themselves or their families (UNDAW, 2002). Their survival and development are seriously threatened as they are forced to live in abominable conditions and stripped of their basic human rights to education, health and protection (UNICEF, 2005). They are also routinely subjected to life-threatening situations including extreme violence, communicable diseases, and physical, emotional and sexual abuse at all stages of the trafficking process. Children who are being sexually exploited confront all of the dangers associated with sexual abuse. In addition, however, they are often also subjugated to being beaten and abused by traffickers, employers, pimps, madams and customers (UNICEF, 2005).

Traffickers use a number of coercive methods and psychological manipulations to maintain control over their young victims and deprive them of their free will, to render them subservient and dependent by destroying their sense of self and connection to others, and to make their escape virtually impossible by destroying their physical and psychological defences (IOM, 2007). The emotional and physical trauma, as well as the degradation associated with being subjected to humiliation and violence, treatment as a commodity, and unrelenting abuse and fear, presents a grave risk to the physical, psychological and social-emotional development of child-trafficking victims (ECPAT, 2005; ILO-IPEC, 2001; Rafferty, in press; Scarpa, 2005). Case studies with victims suggest that CSE is

‘the most physically and emotionally damaging for the victim because of the persistent physical, sexual and psychological abuse that accompanies it on a daily basis’ (IOM, 2007, p. 25).

Related research on child maltreatment suggests that child abuse research has important implications for children who are trafficked. These studies provide strong empirical support of a link between child maltreatment and maladaptive physical and psychological outcomes (Bottoms and Quas, 2006; Osofsky, 1995; Toth and Cicchetti, 2006). For example, research has linked higher levels of physical abuse to emotional problems, aggressive behaviour, substance abuse and suicide (Kaplan et al., 1999; Prino and Peyrot, 1994; Sneddon, 2003). Reports of victims of child trafficking suggest that many also suffer long-lasting health problems as a
result of physical abuse, poor nutrition and untreated health problems (ECPAT, 2005; ILO-IPEC, 2001). Unprotected sex presents a serious risk to sexual health; HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are now prevalent among children who have been trafficked (Scarpa, 2005). Research on children who have been sexually abused has identified such psychological consequences as higher levels of anxiety and depression, lower levels of self-esteem, social isolation, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and suicide (Sneddon, 2003). According to IPU-UNICEF (2005), some children who have been trafficked have resorted to substance abuse to alleviate the pain associated with feelings of lower self-esteem, shame, guilt, sleeplessness, hopelessness and depression; other children have attempted suicide. Finally, some children die as a result of abuse and exploitation, and others disappear, their families reporting that they have not heard from them since they left home.

Abuse and exploitation of children who have been trafficked often go unreported as a result of traditional attitudes towards children and women; even when these crimes are reported, it is the victims who suffer from shame and discrimination, not the perpetrators (Child Rights International Network (CRIN), 2005). Traffickers are rarely prosecuted (UNICEF, 2005). Many children who have been trafficked, in contrast, are subsequently criminalised because of illegal border crossings, being undocumented migrants and for crimes associated with prostitution (UNDAW, 2002). Children under the age of 12 years who have been criminalised are often placed in orphanages while they await organised return; older children are either imprisoned or deported (UNDAW, 2002). Since they are rarely identified as victims, the support and protection services that they so desperately need are rarely provided (UNDAW, 2002).

Factors Associated with Child Trafficking

Although a number of factors have been linked to child trafficking, they are often merely listed with no theoretical framework to guide the development of research in this area. The ecological perspective developed by Bronfenbrenner (1986) is offered here as a possible framework to conceptualise factors associated with child trafficking. An ecological perspective emphasises the relationship between people and their environment, rather than examining the characteristics of either in isolation. When applied to child trafficking as a social problem, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological perspective focuses on characteristics of the setting (for example, poverty and economic inequality), child and family risk factors (for example, gender, age, race/ethnicity, family functioning, education), and
broader contextual variables at the macro level (for example, gender inequality and discrimination; demand factors).

**Poverty and Economic Inequality**

Poverty and increased economic inequality are important risk factors associated with child trafficking and CSE (Omeraniuk, 2005; Shifman, 2003). Indeed, most trafficking victims come from families in poor communities lacking in economic and job opportunities (ECPAT, 2002; Farr, 2005; UNICEF, 2005). Girls in Laos, for example, are becoming increasingly more vulnerable to trafficking since Laos is situated within a fast-developing economic region, its own socio-economic indicators remain low and employment opportunities are limited (Laos and UNICEF, 2003). Cambodia also faces a large array of problems associated with extreme poverty and foreseen closure of garment factories, making children easy targets for exploitation and trafficking rings (ECPAT, 2006b). It is in such environments of dire poverty, particularly, indigent rural areas and shanty towns, that traffickers prey, luring unsuspecting victims with false promises (ECPAT, 2002).

**Child and Family Risk Factors**

Within conditions of vulnerability and high-risk settings characterised by poverty and economic inequality, the most powerful predictor of being trafficked as a child is being female (ECPAT, 2006a; Omeraniuk, 2005). The ILO (2005) estimates that 98% of those forced into CSE are female. According to the US Department of State (2007), those who are commercially sexually exploited in brothels are primarily female. Additional risk factors include age, with girls between the ages of 12 and 16 years at greatest risk, ethnic minority status, inadequate family protection, including impoverished and dysfunctional families, living in a rural area, and lacking education and vocational skills (Beyrer, 2001; ECPAT, 2002; Laos and UNICEF, 2003; Ormeraniuk, 2005; UNDAW, 2002; UNICEF, 2005). As noted by Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR) (2006), strategies to address the gender disparities that exist in terms of access to education, school enrolment and literacy are sorely needed (ECPAT, 2002).

Risk factors at the child and family levels tend to co-exist. For example, in addition to being the most likely group to be poor, ethnic minorities are also more likely to live in rural areas and to be poorly educated (ECPAT, 2002; Laos and UNICEF, 2003; Ormeraniuk, 2005; UNICEF, 2005). According to ECPAT (2006a), children from the hill tribes in Thailand and Myanmar are particularly vulnerable to exploitation because of their lack of legal protections, the stigma they confront, and the fact that they are politically
weak as well as being the most likely group to be poor and uneducated.

The risk factors associated with child trafficking at the level of the child are exacerbated for children without adequate family protection. For example, girls from impoverished families, and dysfunctional families in particular, are most at risk of becoming victims of trafficking (Omeraniuk, 2005; UNDAW, 2002). According to LSCW (2005),

‘Troubled families are the breeding ground for sex workers. And troubled families in poor, marginal and crisis ridden communities generate the most reliable source of cheap girls’ (p. 44).

Family risk factors associated with trafficking of young Cambodian girls include being the eldest female in the family, having a large number of siblings, domestic violence, female-headed household with no family and means of support, sick or ill parents, including those with HIV or AIDS, and being recently orphaned and cared for by extended family who exploit or sell them (LSCW, 2005).

**Gender Inequality and Discrimination**

The vulnerability of girls who are living in poverty is further heightened through cultural traditions and social norms that perpetuate stereotypic attitudes and discrimination toward women and girls (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2006; ECPAT, 2002; IPU and UNICEF, 2005; Mahler, 1997). The ongoing discriminatory attitudes toward women and girls in Southeast Asia are rooted in its history and culture, including colonial sex trading, prostitution and concubinage (Bertone, 2000) fostered, in part, through complex economic relations and organised structures (Lim, 1998). The use of Thailand for military rest and relaxation during the Vietnam War further reinforced sexist and exploitative attitudes toward young women (Bertone, 2000; Muecke, 1991). In Southeast Asia, gender discrimination (from birth, within the family, in schools) continues to be pervasive (IPU and UNICEF, 2005). The more marginalised status of women relative to men, as a result of prevailing gender stereotypes and less valued social roles, continues to place young girls at risk of trafficking and CSE (D’Cunha, 2002). LSCW (2005), for example, highlights a number of gender-related vulnerability factors influencing the rampant trafficking of Cambodian girls from Cambodia into brothels and karaoke bars in Thailand. They include the strict cultural and societal gender norms and roles that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination, the feminisation of poverty, religious beliefs that females are born as a result of bad karma, early marriage and divorce, violence and disparities in educational attainment owing to the traditional belief
which values investing in boys education rather than girls. In Southeast Asia and elsewhere, educating girls is generally viewed as a wasted investment and as a result girls are less likely to be enrolled in school than are boys (UNICEF, 2005, 2006). As noted by UNICEF (2006), for example, females in Southeast Asia are less likely than their male peers to be able to read and write, to be enrolled in primary school and to be enrolled in secondary school. Furthermore, even when they go to school, discriminatory attitudes prevail. An example of how such discriminatory attitudes are perpetuated in Southeast Asia is found in the Cambodia Women’s Code of Conduct, which comprises part of the school curriculum. This document has been described as a current obstacle to the development of women because it contains such recommendations as ‘When the man uses violence, you must accept it, and not use any means to protect yourself,’ and ‘Do not take marital disputes outside the house’ (Sopheap, 2006). Finally, in addition to being marginalised from education, young girls remain particularly vulnerable to trafficking as a result of gender development processes that marginalise them from job opportunities (for example, the existing gendered division of labour and associated attributes that relegate women to the unpaid care economy and men to the productive public sphere) (D’Cunha, 2002; UNDAW, 2002).

Demand Factors

Any discussion of risk factors associated with child trafficking must include those who benefit from exploiting others (Arnold and Bertone, 2002; D’Cunha, 2002; Healy and O’Connor, 2006). The demand for cheap labour and for prostituted women, girls and boys has recently been identified as the primary ‘pull’ factor associated with human trafficking by the US Department of State (2007). As noted earlier, unscrupulous traffickers often take advantage of families in remote villages by tricking parents to part with their children in exchange for a fee and a promise of decent employment. Other key players include brothel owners, corrupt officials in law enforcement, immigration and the judicial system who have been lax in enforcing laws because of their own profiting from the illegal sex trade (Beyrer, 2001; Kapstein, 2006). And finally, the men from industrialised and developing countries who keep traffickers in business, and add to the coffers of corrupt officials through their purchase, exploitation and abuse of children cannot be overlooked. According to the Not for Sale Campaign, one million children every day are forced to sell their bodies in the global industry sex industry because sex tourism is a thriving industry in Southeast Asia with male tourists paying high premiums for sex with children and the lack of government efforts to prosecute and convict officials who profit from or are involved in

‘Current obstacle to the development of women’

‘Sex tourism is a thriving industry in Southeast Asia’
trafficking (http://notforsalecampaign.org). Sex trafficking would not exist without sex buyers and the global demand for cheap victims to exploit (US Department of State, 2007).

Conclusion

In summary, children are being increasingly commodified in the most inhumane ways as they are routinely trafficked within and across borders in violation of their human rights (Bertone, 2000; UNICEF, 2005). As noted above, a number of risk factors have been identified at the level of the child, family and community that exacerbate the vulnerability of some children to child trafficking and CSE. These risk factors include poverty and economic inequality, gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, rural versus urban location, family dysfunction and inadequate family protection. When these risk factors exist in situations of ethnic, racial and gender discrimination, the risk for child trafficking is at its highest (UNICEF, 2005).

Despite some noteworthy progress in terms of international conventions, and the development of comprehensive legislation and multilateral agreements, there remains a dire need for the development and implementation of coordinated and comprehensive international efforts designed to address the economic and social factors that continue to make children vulnerable to these criminal activities (CRIN, 2005; D’Cunha, 2002; UNDAW, 2002). Children in Southeast Asia are highly vulnerable to CSE, which has become a means of survival for some children and their families, as a result of social inequality, poor access to land, limited resources for families to meet the needs of their children, low-quality education, deficient social services and weakened institutions (ECPAT, 2006b; IOM, 2007; US Department of State, 2007). In addition, Southeast Asia, and Thailand and Cambodia in particular, continue to be popular tourist sites and are regarded as places where acquiring children for sex is easy (ECPAT, 2006c; IOM, 2007). The increased demand for sex with children has led to an increase in the supply of child prostitutes and trafficked children in Southeast Asia and the trafficking networks are strong and well organised (UNIAP, 2007). The growth of trafficking networks is further compounded by widespread corruption within the judicial system, law enforcement agencies and government ministries, and some of the people who have the power to shut down the trafficking networks continue to receive an income from the criminals who coordinate the trafficking networks (ECPAT, 2006b; US Department of State, 2007). In discussing the ongoing problems with Thailand as a hub for sex trafficking and the number of children who are routinely exploited in sex businesses around the country, ECPAT (2006d) reports that ‘to
date there is no clear strategy to deal with the demand for sex with children’ (p. 20).

Much of the available literature includes reports written from children’s rights, world health and legal perspectives which, although they describe the experience of horror and degradation for children and youth who become commodities for sale and abuse, are light on scientific research. Further research is therefore needed. Although these sources may be accurate representations, they are not necessarily empirical and result in an over-reliance on anecdotal material. In addition, much of the data on trafficking do not distinguish victims by gender and the research base is further compromised by the lack of a useful theoretical approach to conceptualise the developmental problems likely to be associated with trafficking and CSE. Finally, given their vulnerable position, it is essential to ensure that measures are put in place to protect children from harm and abuse, and ensure that the effects of exploitation and abuse are minimised. The following concluding recommendations focus on prevention, and victim support and empowerment.

Prevention

The building of a protective environment for children to ensure that children are safe must address the underlying causes of child trafficking (UNICEF, 2005), including the gendered demand for cheap labour and the growth of the commercial sex industry created by globalisation. According to UNICEF (2005), steps to protect children must first of all be taken by parents, although the entire community must be involved (e.g. governments, police, religious leaders, teachers, children). Parliamentarians have a specific responsibility because they are in a position to pass laws, adopt budgets, raise awareness and oversee government actions (IPU and UNICEF, 2005).

The building of a protective environment to ensure that children are safe must also include a legislative agenda that focuses on child protection (e.g. anti-trafficking programmes, laws and law enforcement) (Goodey, 2004; IPU and UNICEF, 2005; Manohar, 2002; Scarpa, 2005). Adequate legal procedures must also be established that ensure that those who profit from child slavery are brought to justice, while victims who give evidence are protected and supported (CRIN, 2005; IPU and UNICEF, 2005; UNDAW, 2002; UNICEF, 2005; UNODC, 2006). IPU and UNICEF (2005) recommend that criminal laws must be strengthened, law enforcement must be improved and related laws (e.g. immigration policies, labour laws, adoption laws, laws for protection and assistance) must be enhanced. UNICEF (2005), however, cautions that legal measures to combat trafficking will not be effective unless appropriate
laws are implemented and monitored. UNDAW (2002) stresses the need for national mechanisms and international cooperation, including the development of procedures in every country for registration of births, marriages and deaths.

Protection of human rights and promotion of gender equality must be at the core of all anti-trafficking strategies (D’Cunha, 2002). Since the trafficking of young girls is rooted in gender politics, sexual inequalities, gender-based discrimination, and patriarchal structures that do not condone the commercialisation of women and girls, there must be a strong commitment to changing prevailing social norms and attitudes (IPU and UNICEF, 2005; Shifman, 2003).

Effective strategies must include the economic empowerment of children through education programmes and their introduction into the labour market. Effective strategies that focus on education and skill development must be undertaken to ensure quality education for all children. Where necessary, curricula need to be developed that are rights based and gender sensitive. In addition to children’s education, steps must also be taken to provide teachers, parents and community members with appropriate skills and training to combat trafficking and other offences. Greater dialogue and partnerships at all levels would raise awareness and promote discussion of these issues. Collaboration and community would be greatly enhanced through effective use of the media (IPU and UNICEF, 2005; Valios, 2001).

Victim Support and Empowerment

First and foremost is the need to establish data collection and reporting procedures whereby children are rapidly identified as being victims of trafficking. Cooperative efforts must be developed to facilitate the timely return of children to their communities. Under no circumstances should children who have been trafficked be subject to criminal procedures or sanctions. Rather than punitive measures, children who have been trafficked require specialised interventions and adequate and appropriate services that address their physical, psychological, social and educational needs and facilitate their reintegration into their families, schools and communities (IPU and UNICEF, 2005; Manohar, 2002; UNDAW, 2002; UNICEF, 2005). Programmes and policies for children who have been trafficked should take into account their special needs and rights (Robinson, 2002), and be provided in an environment that fosters their dignity, self-respect and health (IPU and UNICEF, 2005).

In conclusion, the UN set aside 25 March 2007 as the International Day for the Commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. As this event was being
celebrated, the number of contemporary slaves—victims of human trafficking—continued to rise. Sadly, 200 years later, we confront a modern-day slavery whereby countless numbers of children are being lured by unscrupulous traffickers into an omnivorous sex industry, enslaved in brothels around the world, in domestic servitude, and in factories and farms. Due to its global dimensions, effective strategies to stop the sale of children will require a concerted international response (UNDAW, 2002). Our international community must develop an appropriate and effective response.

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References

and answer about the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Bangkok, Thailand.


