



Research article

Exploring child prostitution in a major city in the West African region



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ABSTRACT

The study explored the characteristics of child prostitution in a major city in the West African region. A convenience sample of children in prostitution, specifically girls below age 18 ($n=243$), were recruited on 83 prostitution sites identified in Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso. A survey instrument, consisting of 71 closed-ended question items, was used to explore various variables including profile of children in prostitution, factors of vulnerability to prostitution; prostitution practices, compensations and related issues in child prostitution. The findings show that most children in prostitution in the city were from Burkina Faso (63%) and Nigeria (30%), two countries that do not share borders. Most native respondents practiced prostitution for survival and to support their families. In contrast, all the respondents from Nigeria practiced prostitution as victims of international sex trafficking. An important finding was that 77% of the children in prostitution surveyed were educated. Among the respondents, there were similarities in the major life events that contributed to their situation of prostitution. These life events include early separation with parents, sexual abuse, foster care, and forced marriage. Implications for policy, practice and research are discussed.

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Child prostitution is prevalent in all major cities in the Sub-Saharan African region (ECPAT International, 2014). Yet, there are limited reliable data about this problem. By its geographical position of being at the heart of West Africa, Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso, could be considered a hub of prostitution in the region. Approximately 5200 women are involved in prostitution in this city of a population of 1,915,102 people (INSD, 2012). In 2011, approximately 500 sites with high risk exposure to HIV/AIDS were surveyed, including brothels, restaurants, hotels, and entertainment clubs (ATUJB, 2011). In 2008, 70 prostitution sites were identified through a census (Commune de Ouagadougou, 2010). The identified sites were residences and/or workplaces of about 1500 women of various nationalities and ages. A major issue with the above-mentioned statistics is that prostituted girls were commonly counted and assimilated with adult women in prostitution. Research that focuses on the prevalence and characteristics of child prostitution in Ouagadougou was needed. In response to such a need, a comparative research study aiming to explore child prostitution and its relationship with child migration was conducted in three countries in the West African region. The present paper, based on that research, specifically analyzes the characteristics of child prostitution in Ouagadougou.

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1. Literature review

Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) consists of four forms: child prostitution, child pornography, child sex tourism, and trafficking of children for sexual exploitation (Albanese, 2007; ECPAT International, 2014). According to Article 2(b) of the *Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000)*, child prostitution – the most prevalent type of CSEC – is “the use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration.” This definition also implies children having sex with adults in exchange for basic needs like food, shelter, protection, or in exchange for favors such as higher course grades or extra spending money. In this paper, the terms “child in prostitution” and “prostituted child” are used to describe children involved in prostitution. This review covers research about CSEC in the Sub-Saharan countries because of similarities in the findings about the problem in that region.

CSEC in the Sub-Saharan region became a major topic of research less than two decades ago, particularly after the first World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm in 1996. Until the late 1990s, there was hardly any focus on CSEC in Africa (Ennew, Gopal, Heeran, & Montgomery, 1996). Researchers and activists in Africa believed this problem was difficult to delineate. It was often claimed that the concept of CSEC could not be applied in the African context because the distinction between sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and commercial sexual exploitation could not be clearly defined in analytical terms neither within studies, nor within cultural understandings (Ennew, Gopal, Heeran, & Montgomery).

Much of what is known about CSEC is based on a synthesis of media articles as well as reports often commissioned by U.N. agencies and international NGOs. The hidden nature of the sex trade as well as taboo and stigma attached to sexuality in many African societies could partly explain the limited research about CSEC (De Sas Kropiwnicki, 2012; ECPAT International, 2014). The knowledge stemming from empirical research that gathers data directly from CSEC victims in countries in the Sub-Saharan region is limited (BEFOR, 2014; ILO, 2001; Niyonzima & IBCR, 2012; Perschler-Desai, 2001; Tadesse & Hoot, 2006).

The literature shows that child prostitution is more prevalent than any other forms of CSEC in the West African region (ATUJB, 2011; Bambara, 2011; BEFOR, 2014; CIPCRE, 2009; SP/CNLS-IST, 2011). For instance, BEFOR (2014) found that child prostitution was the most common form of CSEC in a convenience sample of 1472 children aged 10–17 in five cities in Mali. Child prostitution in African countries involves primarily girls from various socio-professional categories including students, apprentices, street vendors, waitresses, domestic maids, etc. (ATUJB, 2011; Bambara, 2011; CIPCRE, 2009). The phenomenon takes place in several places including private residences, parking lots, hotels, restaurants, brothels, and even prisons (Niyonzima & IBCR, 2012).

Research about the causes of widespread CSEC in the Sub-Saharan region is largely anecdotal (Ennew et al., 1996). Poverty is found to be the underlying factor driving CSEC across the region (Bambara, 2011; Bédard, 2005; Compaoré, 2007; Coulibaly, 2010; ECPAT International, 2014; ILO, 2001; Perschler-Desai, 2001). It is not uncommon to find children who practice prostitution in order to support their families (BEFOR, 2014; Coulibaly, 2010; ECPAT International, 2014; ILO, 2001; Perschler-Desai, 2001). Family dysfunction and population displacement are other factors identified as making children increasingly vulnerable to CSEC in some countries (BEFOR, 2014; ILO, 2001; Luty, 2010; Perschler-Desai, 2001). Children who are maltreated or neglected often flee their homes and become involved in the sex trade. Children displaced from their homes or separated from their families due to conflicts are considered at increased risk of involvement in CSEC (BEFOR, 2014; Niyonzima & IBCR, 2012).

Most research identifies sexual abuse as a major life event conducive to CSEC (BEFOR, 2014; De Sas Kropiwnicki, 2012; ECPAT International, 2014; Gnandi, 2007; Lebbie, 2007). For instance, BEFOR (2014) found that involvement of most children in CSEC is often the outcome of a long process that often begins with sexual abuse they have experienced around ages 9–11. In a sample of 1472 children surveyed about CSEC in that study, 37 percent experienced sexual abuse before being involved in prostitution. Apart from sexual abuse, the following childhood situations or events are highlighted by the literature as impacting involvement of children in prostitution in the Sub-Saharan region: foster care, domestic work, lack of parental support, child maltreatment, forced marriage, school dropping out, and illiteracy (Bambara, 2011; ECPAT International, 2014; Gnandi, 2007; Lebbie, 2007; Mikhail, 2002).

HIV/AIDS pandemic is another social issue found to be closely associated with the prevalence of CSEC. First, children who are orphaned due to this disease are often forced to take on the role of primary breadwinner for themselves and their siblings, leading them to engage in the sex trade (ECPAT International, 2014; Perschler-Desai, 2001). Second, HIV/AIDS is a key factor in the commercial sexual exploitation of underage girls because they are considered less likely to have that disease and would be easier to persuade to have unprotected sex (U.S. DOS, 2014). Thus, very young and virgin girls are much in demand and command high prices among sex buyers (Ennew et al., 1996). However, the literature hardly highlights any major presence of sex trafficking networks in CSEC in Sub-Saharan countries. For instance, BEFOR (2014) did not find any visible human trafficking networks involved in CSEC in Mali beyond individuals including brothel managers, hotel managers, family members, and guardians that played the role of go-betweens in the sex trade involving children.

Yet, existing studies about CSEC do not provide a sound analysis of the scope and characteristics of this phenomenon in African countries. The studies were often conducted with very small samples, and they do not help comprehend major issues that are common to the victims. Thus, there is a need for larger research that furthers the knowledge of CSEC in distinct regions of Sub-Saharan Africa by directly surveying CSEC victims from different backgrounds in major cities. The present

study about child prostitution in Burkina Faso intends to make key contributions to the building of quantitative research on the issue of CSEC in the West African region. Three research questions are explored for this purpose in this paper: What is the profile of children in prostitution in Ouagadougou? What life events experienced by children have contributed to their entry into prostitution? What are the characteristics of child prostitution practices in the city?

2. Methods

2.1. Participant selection

The target population was children in prostitution in Ouagadougou. The sampling size could not be initially estimated because of the underground nature of child prostitution and the lack of reliable statistics on the demographics of children in prostitution in the city. Thus, convenience sampling was used to select the participants on the basis of the following selection criteria: respondent being less than 18 years old at the time of the study; being sexually active; and having been compensated for sexual services with money, in kind, or any other form of compensation.

2.2. Data collection and analysis

A survey instrument consisting of 71 closed-ended items¹ divided into the following major three sections was used to address the research questions: profile of children in prostitution, factors of vulnerability to prostitution, and practices of prostitution including compensations and profile of intermediaries. Profile of children in prostitution, focusing on the demographics of respondents, was explored through 18 survey items including the following: How old are you? What country are you from? What is your educational level? And, are you living with your parent(s)? Factors of vulnerability to prostitution, which focused on life events experienced prior to prostitution, were explored through 12 survey items including the following: What important life events had you experienced before you entered the sex trade? And, have you changed your place of living (village, city) at least once in the last five years? Practices of prostitution, which focused on respondent's experiences in prostitution and relationship with intermediaries/pimps, were explored through 41 survey items including the following: How long have you been offering sexual services? How do clients make contact with you? And do other persons receive part of or all the money you earn?

The survey instrument was pretested with 20 children below age 18 in situation in prostitution in a small city lying North of Ouagadougou. The pretest helped address a few issues including consistency of the items, length of time to administer the survey, reactions of respondents to sensitive questions about sexual practices, and language barriers. At a preliminary stage of the study, existing and potential child prostitution sites were identified. These sites included hotels/motels, night clubs, video clubs, brothels, restaurants, truck parking lots, streets with high prevalence of prostitution transactions at night, and surrounds of major outdoor markets and youth training centers. The selection of the data collection sites was based on various elements including two existing mappings of prostitution sites (ATUJB, 2011; *Projet SIDA 2, 2001*), presence of children on prostitution sites, accessibility to identified sites, safety concerns on some sites, and periods of peak prostitution activities on the identified sites. The research team consisted of two principal investigators and 12 trained field agents including seven men and five women with long experience of working with children.

Various organizations, groups, and partners for this study were instrumental in the data collection. Representatives included: public department officers, police officers, community representatives, religious leaders, traditional leaders, school leaders, social services providers, brothel and hotel managers, and former sex workers. Assistance they provided involved helping identify child prostitution sites, giving permissions to meet the target population in places not usually open to outsiders, and being gate-keepers. For instance, five female peer educators served as gate-keepers for access to prostitution sites deemed highly unsafe or not open to others than clients. The peer educators were former sex workers who were trained to provide support service to organizations assisting and educating girls and women in the sex trade.

The data collection took place in February 2014. Data were collected on a total of 83 out of 101 pre-identified prostitution sites. The average duration for administering the study questionnaire was approximately 40 min. A GPS mapping of the prostitution sites where respondents were surveyed was subsequently created on the basis of the collected data. That map aimed to provide detailed information about the specific locations in the city where children in prostitution could be found or contacted for assistance, rescue, and awareness services in the future. Univariate and bivariate analyses of the data were carried out using the SPSS 20.0 quantitative data analysis software. The analyses were based on frequency tables, means, standard deviation, and cross-tabulations.

2.3. Human subject protection

Concerns for potential risks and protection of respondents were addressed through various steps. Necessary authorizations to conduct the research were secured from the appropriate administrative authorities and the research monitoring

¹ The original French survey questionnaire can be obtained from the author upon request.

Table 1
Respondents' country of origin.

Country of origin	N	%
Burkina Faso	152	62.6
Nigeria	73	30
Ghana	5	2.1
Ivorian	5	2.1
Togo	3	1.2
Benin	2	0.8
Other	3	0.12
Total	243	100.0

committee in the University of Ouagadougou. Prior to submit the current paper, an approval for publication based on the study data was secured from the author's university's Institutional Review Board in the U.S.A.

Respondents provided informed assent and were provided referral information for social and health related assistance services. Referral information provided to respondents had some subsequent positive impact. For instance, within the period of and after the data collection, partner social service agencies reported substantial increase in calls from prostituted children for assistance services.

No information that could identify respondents was recorded during the data collection. In Burkina Faso, there are legal procedures that stipulate that abused children who are encountered during research should be reported to the police for assistance. However, the study being anonymous, there was no way to report any prostituted children to the police or social services. During the preliminary meeting with major stakeholders for the study, including the police, social services agencies, and city officials, the question of reporting cases of child prostitution was carefully discussed. It was concurred that reporting specific cases was not feasible in the absence of identifiers.

3. Findings

3.1. Respondent demographics

A total of 243 girls in prostitution aged 13–17 years participated in the study. The mean age of the respondents was 16 years and a half ($SD = 0.8$). Based on the findings about country of origin, 63% of the respondents were from Burkina Faso and 30% were from Nigeria, two countries that do not share borders (Table 1).

The findings about education level indicate that most of the respondents were educated. In fact, 187 out of the 243 respondents were educated, meaning that 77% of the sample had some level of formal education. Specifically, out of the 187 respondents with education, 39% had the primary education level, and 5% had the college education level (Table 2). More important, the findings indicate that most respondents had the secondary education level (56%) including 31% of native respondents and 21% of respondents from Nigeria. No respondents from Nigeria were among the 56 respondents without any formal education.

The findings show that all the respondents from Nigeria were victims of sex trafficking. Their general comments in the survey showed that they were lured into Burkina Faso with the false promise of being in transit to Europe for job opportunities. They reported being forced into prostitution by sex traffickers because the latter said the girls owed them huge amounts of money for their travel documents and transportation. Some of the respondents reported being threatened of torture and killing if they ever refused to do the sex work or try to run away.

The findings regarding marital status showed that 92% of the children in prostitution were singles against 8% who were once or still married. More than half of the 243 respondents (51%) – mainly Nigerian girls (25%) and Burkina Faso natives (26%) – reported prostitution as their primary occupation. In the context of this study, primary occupation means an activity, paid or unpaid, that a respondent practiced for 7–10 h during at least five days a week. Most of the 49% percent of the respondents who reported having a primary occupation different from prostitution were from other countries in West Africa. Primary occupation reported by this group included being waitress, student, house maid, shop assistant, and apprentices in vocational work and handicraft, etc.

Table 2
Distribution of respondents based on level of education and country of origin.

Respondent's education level (N = 187)	Respondent's country of origin							Total %
	Benin %	Togo %	Nigeria %	Burkina Faso %	Ghana %	Mali %	Ivory Coast %	
Primary	–	1.1	10.1	25.5	1.1	0.5	1.1	39.4
Secondary	1.1	0.5	20.7	31.4	1.6	–	0.5	55.9
College	–	–	2.6	2.2	–	–	–	4.8
Total %	1.1	1.6	33.5	59.0	2.7	0.5	1.6	100.0

Table 3
Distribution of respondents based on family life, responsibility, and residence issues.

Variables	N	%
Respondent's number of children (N = 243)		
No child	148	60.9
One child	79	32.5
Two children	16	6.6
Total	243	100.0
Respondent's number of dependents (N = 94)		
One dependent	30	31.9
Two dependents	28	29.7
Three dependents	13	13.8
Four dependents	12	12.8
Five dependents	2	2.1
Over five dependents	9	9.7
Total	94	100.0
Person a respondent lives with (N = 243)		
Living alone	87	35.8
Person unrelated to family	57	23.5
Relatives	38	15.6
Both parents	25	10.3
Mother only	17	7.0
Spouse/partner	18	7.4
Father only	1	0.4
Total	243	100.0
Reason for non-residence with parents ^a (N = 200)		
Desire for self-sufficiency	69	34.5
Job opportunities	63	31.5
Death of one or both parents	30	15.0
Divorce of parents	15	7.5
Child abuse	11	5.5
Foster care	11	5.5
Forced marriage	6	3.0
Training/schooling	5	2.5
Other reasons	27	14.8

^a This variable is based on a multiple choice question item.

3.2. Family environment

Data on respondents' family environment were collected through the following variables: respondent's number of children, number of dependents, people with whom the respondent lives, age at first separation from parents, and reasons for not residing with parents. The findings about number of children indicate that 95 out of the 243 respondents (39%) had children, including 33% with one child and 7% with two children (Table 3). Fifty of the respondents with children lived together with them. It was also found that 94 (39%) out of the 243 respondents had between one and five family members as dependents, including 32% with one dependent and 30% with two dependents (Table 3). These findings provide a glimpse of the big part income from child prostitution potentially played in the financial support of some respondents' families.

The findings indicate that most respondents did not have adequate family environment and parental protection and viewed sex trade as a substitute survival means. At the time of the study, 200 (82%) out of the 243 respondents were living with other people than their parents, whereas just 43 respondents (18%) lived with both parents or with either one (Table 3). In spite of their very young age, the majority of the respondents (36%) lived alone. Among the respondents who left their parents at least once, six percent did so before age six and 18% between age 6 and 12. Reasons for not residing with parents included desire for self-sufficiency (35%) and job opportunities (32%) (Table 3). Other reasons included divorce or death of parents, forced marriage, child abuse, and child placement. Considering that only one out of every ten children resided with both parents, non-residence with parents, among other factors, appeared to put children at risk of being victims of prostitution.

3.3. Factors of vulnerability to prostitution

Factors of vulnerability of children to prostitution were explored through two major variables: family situations and life events experienced before prostitution, and reasons for continuing practicing prostitution. Family situations and life events explored included: early separation from parents, forced marriage, sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancy, child placement, beggary, maidservant work, displacement due to disasters, etc. The findings showed that 28% of the respondents were in situations of sexual abuse before entering prostitution whereas 31% of the respondents had unwanted pregnancy before prostitution (Table 4). Fourteen percent of the respondents were in a situation of domestic servitude whereas 9% were in

Table 4
Major life events/situations experienced before prostitution.

Life events/situations respondent experienced prior to prostitution ^a (N = 243)	n	%
Unwanted pregnancy	75	30.9
Sexual abuse	67	27.6
Early separation from parents and self-support	44	18.1
Foster care/child placement	33	13.6
Domestic servitude	33	13.6
Forced marriage	22	9.1
Refugee/displaced by conflict or disaster	8	3.3
Other life events	48	19.8

^a This variable is based on a multiple choice question.

a situation of forced marriage and 14% were in a situation of traditional foster care prior to their entry in prostitution. A relatively high proportion of children (20%) reported 12 other life events they experienced before prostitution. These events could not be properly categorized in the main modalities in Table 4 because of their variety and very low frequency among the responses. These include: being a victim of abduction, witnessing domestic violence, rejection by the community, death of parents, experiencing female circumcision, being forced to serve a traditional divinity, etc.

Multiple reasons respondents reported to explain their continued practice of prostitution included: supporting parents (34%), getting trendy outfit and electronic devices (33%), paying bills and foods (26%), providing for their own children (23%), and being self-sufficient (23%).

3.4. Prostitution practices

Prostitution practices were explored with various variables including the following: respondent's age at first sexual intercourse, time spent in prostitution, number of hours of prostitution in a day, number of days in prostitution in a week, number of clients in a day, number of clients in a week, periods of prostitution, types and estimates of compensations, strategies to find clients, and profile of intermediaries in child prostitution.

3.4.1. Categories and strategies in child prostitution. In Ouagadougou, categories of children in prostitution included: *hookers* (girls frequently strolling on determined streets and boulevards seeking clients at night); *streetwalkers* (girls moving around and inside major bars and hotels looking for potential clients); and *bikers* (girls riding their own mopeds, scooters or motorcycles, roaming across the city looking for clients). The findings showed that clients would contact children in prostitution in various places including the latter's work/training sites, streets, restaurants, cafés, night and video clubs, and school surroundings. In fact, 3 out of every 10 respondents reported roaming night-clubs and video clubs in search for clients. It was also found that 16% of the respondents – particularly students – would register their contact information and pictures with major hotels so that they could be contacted when clients needed their services. Just one out of every 20 respondents (5%) reported using the internet to hook up with clients.

3.4.2. Prostitution sites. The findings showed that children in prostitution offered sexual services in more than one setting. Three out of every four respondents (79%) would offer sexual services in restaurant guestrooms, whereas one out of every four respondents (25%) would do so in brothels, and four out of every ten (42%) in a hotel room. The findings also showed that one out of every three respondents would meet clients either in private residences.

3.4.3. Time spent in prostitution. At the time of the study, the average time spent in prostitution by the respondents was 20 months. It was found that 124 of the 243 respondents had been in prostitution for less than 12 months whereas 104 respondents had been in this situation for 12–35 months and 15 respondents for at least 36 months (Table 5). The average number of days of prostitution in a week was 5 days. One of every three respondents (35%) practiced prostitution for 7 days a week. The average number of clients the respondents served per week was 14. More specifically, 24% of the respondents had about 5 clients a week whereas 47% had more than 10 clients a week, and 24% had more than 20 clients. The average

Table 5
Length of time in prostitution based on respondent's age.

Respondent's age	Length of time in prostitution			Total N
	Less than 12 months n	12–35 months n	36 months and more n	
Under 15 years	1	4	0	5
15	13	7	0	20
16	36	20	0	56
17	74	73	15	162
Total N	124	104	15	243

Table 6
Distribution of respondents based on characteristics, roles, and shares of intermediaries.

Variables	N	%
Respondent has intermediaries (N = 243)		
No	136	56.0
Yes	107	44.0
Total	243	100.0
Intermediaries getting part of compensations from child prostitution ^a (N = 107)		
Pimp/protector	52	48.6
Prostitution site manager	47	43.9
Job training boss	9	8.4
Boyfriend	6	5.6
Parent	4	3.7
Relative	4	3.7
Host family member	3	2.8
Other	7	6.8
Role intermediaries play in sex transactions ^a (N = 107)		
Protect the minor	60	56.1
Provide rooms for sexual services	47	43.9
Help find customers	37	34.6
Others	9	8.4
Portion of remuneration received by intermediaries (N = 107)		
Less than 25%	51	49.0
About 25%	34	31.7
About 50%	12	10.6
About 75%	3	2.9
Over 75%	6	5.8
Total	107	100.0

^a These variables are based on multiple choice questions.

number of daily duration in prostitution was 5 h. Night time was reported as the peak period for child prostitution. Indeed, 70% of the respondents practiced prostitution at night. The findings also showed that 12% of the respondents worked full time. Clients served by the respondents were ages between 20 and 40 years old, and were overwhelmingly males (98%) and two percent females.

3.4.4. Forms of compensations received by children in prostitution. The findings indicate that the respondents were compensated not only in cash, but also in kind or in both forms of remuneration. Cash was the primary form of compensation received by the surveyed children. As a matter of fact, 99% of the respondents reported being usually paid in cash. However 33% of the respondents also reported being remunerated in kinds (clothes, electronic devices, motorcycles, apartments, etc.). Just 4% of the respondents reported receiving compensations in services. The average monetary estimate of compensation received by the respondents after a typical sexual service was approximately 6.000 CFA Francs (i.e., local currency), which is equivalent to USD12.00. The average daily gain for a child in prostitution working full-time was estimated at USD75.00, which implies an average weekly gain of approximately USD375.00.

3.4.5. Profile of intermediaries in prostitution. In the context of this paper, the term intermediaries is used to designate not only pimps but also any individuals (i.e., parents, siblings, relatives, friends, etc.) that facilitate directly or indirectly at some point the process of recruitment, travel, housing, and sexual exploitation of children for commercial purposes. Pimps are intermediaries who force children into prostitution, control them and confiscate a large portion of or all the money children make. It was found that 107 of the 243 respondents (44%) had intermediaries who received a portion of compensation from prostitution whereas 136 respondents (56%) do not have intermediaries for their sexual transactions (Table 6). Pimps (49%) made up the largest percentage of the 107 intermediaries reported, followed by prostitution site managers (44%) (Table 6). The findings showed that the intermediaries played various roles in child prostitution. Based on the multiple choice answers reported, 35% of the 107 respondents with intermediaries reported that the latter helped them find clients, whereas 56% reported that intermediaries protected them (Table 6). For 44% of the respondents, intermediaries provided a place where to offer sexual services.

According to four intermediaries interviewed as a follow-up to the child survey, the relationship between children in prostitution and themselves included the following: “protégée and pimp relationship” “barmaid and employee relationship” “tenant and landlord relationship” and “girlfriend and protector relationship”. The findings revealed that 80% of the 107 children with intermediaries paid less than 25% of their income to intermediaries, whereas 10% of the same group had to give 50% of their compensations to these go-betweens (Table 6). Overall, it was estimated that the bulk of gains made by child in prostitution with intermediaries (about 70%) would profit various people.

4. Discussion

The finding that three of every four children in prostitution in the city were educated, appears to contradict, to some extent, the literature indicating that lack of education is a major risk factor of vulnerability of children to prostitution (BEFOR, 2014; CIPCRE, 2009; Coulibaly, 2010; David-Gnahoui, 2006; Niyonzima & IBCR, 2012; Tadesse & Hoot, 2006). It is often implied that illiterate children and those who have been expelled from school or are dropouts are at a high risk for becoming involved in prostitution. Yet, the finding of a substantial incidence of prostitution among children with the secondary education level (56% of the 187 educated respondents) points out that general education may not necessarily be a protective factor against CSEC. In contrast, it can be argued that lack of education about sex and sexuality in particular plays a more important part in vulnerability of children to prostitution. So, children who have an increased exposure to specific education about sex and sexual risk behaviors, not just general education, are less likely to be vulnerable to prostitution. This idea implies the importance of raising or increasing awareness about CSEC in educational settings similar to initiatives being taken in the educational system of developed countries such as the United States.

Due to a recent growing concern about the prevalence of domestic minor sex trafficking in the United States, substantial awareness about CSEC is being developed and raised in some school programs across this country, through the dissemination of information resources from major anti-trafficking federal agencies and departments. For instance, a recent manual released by the Department of Education Office of Safe and Healthy Students about human trafficking, *Human Trafficking in America's Schools*, aimed to help school officials comprehend how CSEC impacts schools, to recognize the indicators and signs of CSEC inside school settings, and to develop policies, protocols, and partnerships to address and prevent the commercial sexual exploitation of students (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2015). Similar awareness about CSEC could be launched in schools in African countries to help address the widespread issue of prostitution among young students.

Although the respondents from Nigeria (30% of the sample) had at least the secondary education level, all of them became victims of sex trafficking. They were lured and coerced into believing they would be in transit through Ouagadougou on their smuggling to Europe. The situation of these girls is very similar to woes experienced by international sex trafficking victims in other countries. Describing the woes of Nigerian girls in prostitution in Burkina Faso, Billy Briggs in a (2012) article in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, states:

“The girls come mostly from Nigeria and pay money to traffickers as they want to go to European nations such as Britain, France and Italy. They are told they will be nannies and housemaids but they end up here and find they have been ‘sold’. They must then prostitute themselves to pay off the debt.”

According to the London-based organization AFRUCA (Africans Unite against Child Abuse) cited in Briggs (2012), criminal gangs, mostly Nigerian, were targeting Burkina Faso in order to avoid tightened border controls elsewhere. The respondents from Nigeria in the present study were controlled and exploited by an international, well-organized network of sex traffickers and pimps, which is not the case with most of the other respondents.

The relatively high percentage of teenage mothers among the respondents indicates a high level of early family responsibility among prostituted children. This situation of teenage motherhood among these children could be linked to various experiences including unwanted pregnancy, child marriage, or other sexual abuse related situations that the findings highlighted. The early motherhood among the respondents could as well be related to issues of unprotected sex or be an effect of early separation of children from their families. As the findings point out, most respondents came from dysfunctional families. More to the point, 82% of them lived with other people than their biological parents. Likewise, the finding that four respondents out of every ten had at least one family member as a dependent highlights the underlying issue of family poverty pushing minors into prostitution. Thus, not only had a significant number of children in prostitution had to care about their own children, but also they had to provide financial support to parents and relatives.

Most respondents were not only separated from their families prematurely, but more important, some were in several exploitative situations whereas others experienced sexual abuse prior to prostitution. Findings about social situations of violence and exploitation that preceded the practice of prostitution indicate a lack of protective family environment for children against sexual exploitation in the sociocultural context of the study. Social situations including sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancy, child placement, appeared to have contributed to the respondents' vulnerability to prostitution. One out of every three children in prostitution surveyed experienced unwanted pregnancy. Consequences of teenage pregnancy can include abortions, dropping out of school, rejection by family, and single parenting. Life events such sexual abuse and unwanted pregnancy put children at risk of being sexually exploited for profit as they sought shelter, food and protection in the city. Such events could undermine the psychological and emotional health of children and make them highly vulnerable to CSEC.

The findings about the profile of children in prostitution in this study seem to be in stark contrast with the literature about child prostitution in developed countries. Research indicates that victims of CSEC are primarily runaway and homeless children, children who use drugs, children who are generally recruited, groomed, controlled and sexually exploited by pimps. Both the literature review for this study and the findings appear to contradict the above-mentioned description of the typical child in prostitution. It can be implied that social environment should be given due consideration in research or in a comparative analysis of CSEC in distinct geographical contexts. In contrast with the trendy use of the internet and social media for CSEC in developed countries, there was very little use of the internet by respondents in this study to connect with

clients or advertise sexual services, even though some respondents reported having a relatively easy access to the internet. One out of every 20 reported ever using the internet to hook up with potential clients.

Regarding the findings about income from prostitution, any clear-cut assumption could not be made about the estimates of compensation received by the surveyed children because, first, the estimates did not account for monetary portions of payment actually handed to intermediaries; second, the estimates were likely to hide variables that could only be highlighted through further quantitative analysis of the data about income from prostitution. Finally, respondents' self-reports about their compensations were likely to be biased. However, these findings, highlighting the significance of income from child prostitution, could be given due attention when developing alternative intervention programs for children in prostitution. For instance, developing income generating activities that may be far less economically rewarding than income from prostitution could push some children back to the sex trade as a supplemental source of income, since they may have dependents to support.

With the presence of intermediaries in transactions with clients, a child in prostitution would obviously earn less than another one not having any go-between. However, without an intermediary, presumably it may be more difficult for children in prostitution to find clients or find a place where to provide sexual services. Likewise, an intermediary could play the role of a protector in situations where violence against children in prostitution is very likely. The finding that 56% of the respondents did not have intermediaries could imply practice of prostitution as survival sex by 11 out of every 20 respondents, especially among children who were natives of Burkina Faso. In contrast, most of the respondents with pimps, primarily from Nigeria, were victims of both international child sex trafficking.

4.1. *Study limitations*

Due to the use of convenience sampling, the results of this study are neither generalizable, nor representative of all prostituted minors in the target country or city. The research site selection was made on the basis of certain factors that facilitated access to the target population. Not all the child prostitution sites identified were visited for various reasons including difficulty finding participants at some periods of the day, change of address or premises of some sites, lack of access to child refugees practicing prostitution. The findings could have been representative of children in prostitution in the city if it had been possible to first conduct a census of all children in prostitution and then use random sampling to select participants, but this was not realistically feasible due to various constraints. However, these limitations hardly affected the quality of the data collected and the reliability of the study findings.

5. **Implications for practice, policy, and research**

This study, which explores the characteristics of child prostitution in Ouagadougou, provides substantial information to victim services providers and law enforcement agencies about the profile of children in this practice, factors of vulnerability to child prostitution, the scope of income estimates from child prostitution, and the types of business relationship between children in prostitution and intermediaries. The mapping of child prostitution sites, which was done during the data collection, has three advantages. First, it provides visibility about child prostitution in the city. Second, it is a helpful tool for assistance agencies that aim to provide timely victims and outreach services to children in prostitution in specific places where they are accessible. Third, it can help first responders such as the police to rescue children who are victims of sex trafficking and go after pimps and other people preying on prostituted children.

The study provides substantial information for social services organizations seeking research based data to support their proposals and advocacy about CSEC. The findings about the level of education of children and the scope of income child prostitution may generate are key indicators that could help develop an effective policy response to address CSEC in countries in the West African region in general, and especially in Burkina Faso. The result about education among the respondents is also a call for initiating education programs about CSEC in schools and training centers. Such efforts could help both students involved in prostitution and those uninvolved to become aware of the risks and consequences of CSEC and ways to avoid falling victims of sex trafficking. Further research could go beyond the limitations of the present study, and use a mixed research method and random sampling to develop a better understanding of child prostitution not only in Ouagadougou but also in other major cities in the Sub-Saharan region.

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